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ISSUE 191

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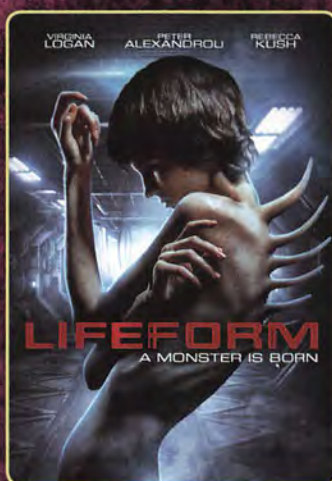
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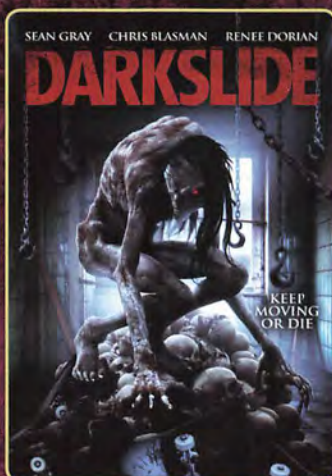
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Following their stunning horror debut feature *Goodnight Mommy*, Austrian filmmakers Veronika Franz and Severin Fiala wrap up trauma, fanaticism, and icy isolation with a yuletide bow in *The Lodge*.

PLUS! Robert Eggers on his new maritime horror, *The Lighthouse*, an oceanside folk tale of masculinity, madness, and the endlessness of the sea.

by **ANDREA SUBISSATI**

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Does horror cause people to do bad things? It's an argument that we've seen before, from the Hays Code to Video Nasties, *The Exorcist* to *Mortal Kombat*...

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NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND

Earlier this week, the *Rue Morgue* office agreed to take on an intern to work co-op hours toward completing high school. Later that day, the school called to cancel the internship – the student's mother, a deeply religious woman, forbade it.

I hope that sharing this anecdote doesn't embarrass the student in question (hey, you made it into *Rue Morgue* anyway; suck on that, Mom!) because my intention is to draw attention to the fact that, in spite of the horror T-shirts being stocked at Hot Topic and the fancy cocktails I sipped on Warner Bros' dime when they whisked me off to the *It: Chapter Two* premiere in LA, and in spite of the indignation I saw online when we polled last issue's VS debate (*Has Horror Finally Been Accepted Into the Mainstream?*), the genre hasn't lost its subversive edge.

You might disagree, sitting in your living room wallpapered with the art of Pullin, Deck and Edmiston, but to the average God-fearin' Dick and Jane, we're still very much weirdos and potentially even dangers to society.

It's easy to forget this fact, and there are a number of reasons why – not the least of which is the emergence of the internet. If you're my age or thereabouts, you can remember a time when video stores were just as strict as cinemas regarding age restrictions on horror titles. (Heck, I needed a note from my mom to check out Stephen King books at my local library.) The only way to find out about more obscure genre fare was locker room word-of-mouth, or, should you be so blessed, an elder sibling or cousin hoping to traumatize you. But just because it's easier than ever to be a horror fan, it's also easier than ever to insulate ourselves in an echo chamber of fandom, forgetting that there's a bigger world out there who fear and, yeah, sometimes even revile us.

But here's another nugget I gleaned from the response to last issue's VS: that insofar as we might consider ourselves an inclusive community of understanding and acceptance, there's a part of us that wants to protect ourselves from the mainstream, lest our vivid blood reds be muted to more socially acceptable tones. Back when I was in grad school, I remember studying counterculture and how kids of the '80s ripped their jeans as a fashion statement until clothing manufacturers started "distressing" clothing for them. It was a case of commercialism doing what it does – companies will always try to co-opt whatever's hot and happening – but here's the thing: without fail, for the past 30 years, youth of the era *always* found new ways to fuck up their denim pants and jackets. My point is that horror belongs to the fans and whatever companies try to suck it up and sell it back to us are simply trying to keep up. At the end of the day, the horror world will always be coming up with new and novel ways to freak us out, and the year 2020 is a fresh pair of jeans just waiting to be torn into.

Before I sign off for the year, I have one important announcement to impart. "Ghoulis" Gary Pullin has made an indelible mark in *Rue Morgue*, both in his twelve iconic years as Art Director and in the years since as columnist. It's been my great pleasure to watch his career blossom, both as his friend and as his editor.

Of course, I knew we wouldn't be able to keep him forever, what with the likes of Mondo, Wax-works and Skuzzles battling for his precious time. As such, this issue's Fright Gallery will be Gary's last, and we wish him all the best as he continues to make the world a more ghoulish place. He leaves his column in the very capable hands of visual artist Paige Reynolds; one half of Phantom City Creative, her work in fine art and visual effects has been exhibited and celebrated across the continent, and we're lucky to have her. Please join me in welcoming Paige to the family, and ringing in a new decade of *Rue Morgue*!

Happy holidays, weirdos!

Andrea Subissati

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THE LODGE

Design by Andrew Wright

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POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



CONGRATS LADIES and gentlemen, you officially knocked the ball out of the park and out of the Gates of Hell with your Halloween issue (which is, in the opinion of this long-time reader, your absolute best). Only at *Rue Morgue* can I expect to find a twelve-page look at Satan as the biggest boogeyman in history! Kudos to Andrea and staff for keeping it badass, classy and smart every damn time, no small thing. Happy Halloween, freaks, here's to 22 more years!

RONNIE DIABLO, VIA EMAIL

EXCELLENT JOB with this month's magazine [RM190]! Andrea – fantastic article with William Friedkin! Speaking with such a legend must have been an awesome experience.

@WCSTUCKEY, VIA TWITTER

I'M NOT ABOVE making impulsive online purchases while drunk and, if I'm honest, I'd say my regret quotient is well below 50% on aggregate. This one, however, might well be my best drunk buy to date.

@ABILLIONTWO, VIA TWITTER



I LOVE THE MAG and wish I could get an issue every month. That said, I understand everything that goes into it and all of the work that it takes. I'm a fairly patient person *but...* have you ever considered at least doing both September and October issues since a lot of horror movies tend to drop in the fall and Halloween tends to be a special season for a lot of us?! One extra issue every year couldn't create that much [work], could it?! I would certainly pay more for my subscription and it would enhance my favourite holiday and season. Food for thought? Thanks for everything that you do and keep up the good fight!

SEAN BUFFINGTON, VIA EMAIL

I WENT TO MY LOCAL bookstore to buy the latest issue of *Rue Morgue*. As always, I just took it off the shelf not even looking at the cover and paid

for it. Later that very long day, I sat down to relax and read my favourite magazine. It was only then I noticed that the cover had Freddy wearing a rainbow sweater! All I can say is..... *thank you, thank you, thank you!* I hope you know how much it means to me, and the many LGBTQ+ horror fans out there, that you put together a "Queer Fear" special issue. Growing up in the '80s, *NOES2* was, and still is, my favourite in the franchise. I could relate to Mark Patton's character Jesse. Finally, a horror movie where the main character is gay, albeit not openly out of the closet, and not a total stereotype. Again, I just want to say *thank you!*

JOHN DROWNE JR., VIA EMAIL

REALLY, @RUEMORGUE? An entire issue on "Queer Fear" (#189) and not one word on the original *Fright Night* (1985), despite the film having three gay principal cast members (Amanda Bearse, Stephen Geoffreys, and Roddy McDowall) and a bisexual vampire as the main villain? C'mon!

@VONSWANKENSTEIN, VIA TWITTER

TEA AND RUE MORGUE.... perfect.

JOE ARELLANO, VIA FACEBOOK



PROPS TO MY WIFE for picking up the new issue of @RueMorgue today. I cannot overstate how much I've been looking forward to the '80s slasher film retrospective.

@HORRORGEEK76, VIA TWITTER

SERIOUSLY @RUEMORGUE, I've been reading since the *Twilight Zone* issue in 2003, my freshman year of undergrad, and this Halloween/anniversary issue is absolutely creative fire as I put together my own little horror site. Thank you!

@JEROMIAHVALESKA, VIA TWITTER

RE: RUE MORGUE TV – In some videos the background music is too loud and makes it a little hard to understand what is being said (maybe it's a problem mostly for people for whom English is not their native language, like me). If you are going to continue with the "Play Dead" section, please do not make it only about video games (the video games section is the only one I skip when I read the magazine). Please talk about tabletop games, interactive experiences, etc. I feel one episode a week is too little. Could you consider [more frequent uploads] or maybe longer episodes? And last, a personal plea: Could you please resurrect in some format my beloved Rue Morgue Radio on this new channel?

JUAN DIAZ, VIA YOUTUBE

I ABSOLUTELY LOVE *Rue Morgue TV*, it's an excellent addition to the magazine and I specifically love how so many fields and topics within the horror genre are covered and we get to meet so many experts on the show. Can't wait to see what else you guys have in store for us.

JANNE G., VIA YOUTUBE

RE: PLAY DEAD on RUE MORGUE TV – After watching the *Worse Than Death* segment I'm downloading the game on my iPad and can't wait to play. I'm a fan of horror games so I'm excited to hear about this new game to try. Also, I'm loving this channel, keep it up.

CHRISTINE HUFFORD, VIA YOUTUBE

RE: RUE MORGUE TV – I enjoyed Grim Reader very much. I would definitely like more recommendations for horror literature, especially some hidden gems that are less mainstream.

DEATHFEMME, VIA YOUTUBE

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POST MORTEM

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CORONER'S REPORT

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

ISSUE # 191

Legendary Scream Queen Jamie Lee Curtis is the godmother of *Donnie Darko* and *Velvet Buzzsaw* star Jake Gyllenhaal.

According to bassist Geezer Butler, Black Sabbath began wearing crosses after a group of Satanists put a curse on the band. The crosses were made out of spare metal by Ozzy Osbourne's father, who used to work at a metal factory making car parts.

Picnic at Hanging Rock cinematographer Russell Boyd enhanced the film's diffuse and ethereal look with the simple technique of placing a piece of bridal veil over the camera lens.

Felicity Kadlec Rossi, 21, recently married a blood-spattered zombie doll she had been in a seven-year relationship with. Felicity procured the doll when she was just thirteen, and claims to have developed romantic feelings for it while still in her teens.

Friday the 13th director Sean S. Cunningham directed the chase sequence in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984).

"Milan. What a beautiful place to die," were the last words of veteran screen actor John Carradine (*The Sentinel*, *House of Dracula*).

Niels Hogel, a 41-year-old German nurse, admitted to having murdered 100 of his patients between 2000 and 2005 by deliberately inducing heart failure because he enjoyed "being able to resuscitate them," even though he was not always successful.

Spectrophobia refers to the fear of mirrors and one's own reflection, and can stem from a traumatic event involving mirrors, or low self-esteem related to one's physical appearance.

For 2007's *Trick 'r Treat*, little people were used to fill in for trick-or-treating kids, since the scenes were shot mainly at night and children could not work the required hours.

Despite his legendary reputation, it took 50 years for composer Ennio Morricone to be awarded his single competitive Oscar (for *The Hateful Eight* in 2015).

Before the invention of the gallows, convicted murderers were hanged from the tops of ladders. It was believed that their ghosts would remain beneath them, giving rise to the superstition to never walk underneath a ladder.

Both *Ghost Story* (1981) stars Fred Astaire (who plays Ricky Hawthorne) and Melvyn Douglas (who plays Dr. John Jaffery) are mentioned in Peter Straub's source novel upon which the movie is based.

After both were coming off failed film projects, Drew Goddard and Joss Whedon locked themselves in a hotel room and wrote the script for 2012's *Cabin in the Woods* in just three days.

COMPILED BY BENITO BLACK
GOT A WEIRD STAT OR MORBID FACT?
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EXPIRING MINDS

ON RUE MORGUE'S
SOCIAL MEDIA



What horror movie maniac would you most like to spend the holidays with?

Billy from the original *Black Christmas* mas just to keep me on my toes.

@SCRACKMOTE, VIA INSTAGRAM

I'd befriend the semi in *Maximum Overdrive* and turn Emilio Esteves into my sex slave.

@CRYSTAL_TYLER_MILSAP,
VIA INSTAGRAM

Hannibal...he can cook.

@KINGSTONSJAXSONSMUMMY, VIA INSTAGRAM

Axel/Harry Warden from *My Bloody Valentine* cuz those Canadian slashers know you gotta boil the hot dogs.

@CGNOIR, VIA INSTAGRAM

Frank Zito from *Maniac*. There's a single that can be played on the stereo that should get him into the holiday spirit.

COLIN BAXTER, VIA FACEBOOK

Any of them. They can't possibly be worse than the psychopaths I'm related to.

NATE GARDNER, VIA FACEBOOK

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THE STILL-BURNING FIRES OF CENTRALIA

In Christophe Gans' 2006 film *Silent Hill*, a woman takes her adopted daughter to the titular town in a desperate bid to figure out what's behind the girl's horrible nightmares. Based on the influential survival horror video game series, the film takes a rapid turn to the fantastical and the grotesque. Falling ash, supernatural conspiracies, and giant monsters with terrifying geometrical helmets certainly don't give off a "based on a true story" vibe, but screenwriter Roger Avary drew from more than the video games for the film, basing his take on *Silent Hill* on Centralia, Pennsylvania, a small town that's been sitting on an underground coal fire that's been burning for over five decades – and continues to this day.

The Locust Mountain Coal and Iron Company purchased the land and commenced mining operations in the 1850s. Coal was the lifeblood of the town well into the early 20th century, but it came at a cost of human blood. A local secret society of Irish immigrants known as the Molly Maguires spoke out against the mine's harsh working conditions, eventually resorting to arson and even the murder of local foremen and supervisors.

The company fired back with equal vitriol in

the form of a sham trial, featuring testimony from the president of the Reading Railroad (a tiny conflict of interest given that his company was tied to coal) that led to twenty members of the Molly Maguires being sentenced to death.

The onset of World War I and a demand for cleaner sources of energy led to a significant reduction in output from Centralia. Then, in 1962, the fire started. The prevailing theory about its source is that town officials had arranged for a controlled fire at the local landfill to burn off some of the garbage before that year's Memorial Day event. It's hard to imagine this decision was legal, given the risk of the flames reaching the coal seam underneath the town, and that appears to be exactly what happened.

Despite attempts to contain the fire by digging a trench, it continued to spread until the town's homes were at risk from dangerous fumes and reduced structural integrity. What began as voluntary evacuations later shifted to mandatory ones, with the state declaring eminent domain in the name of public safety. Those residents who chose to stay dug in their heels, and after several prolonged legal battles the two sides reached a compromise: those in their homes could stay, but no new residents would be permitted to move in.



Today, Centralia's population is down to an estimated ten residents, and most of the buildings have been torn down. Old remnants of Route 61 sit abandoned and crumbling, with wisps of smoke signalling the fire still burning below. While the jittering, bandaged nurses and religious cults from *Silent Hill* are nowhere to be found, one can't help but wonder what else might be lurking in those blazing caverns just below the surface...

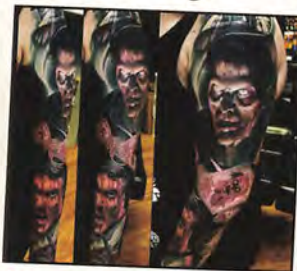
BRYAN CHRISTOPHER

Body Horror

CHRISTOPHER BETTLEY

LOCATION: Grand Rapids, Michigan

INSTAGRAM: @christopherbettley



◀ Hailing from Last Rogue Tattoo in Michigan, Christopher Bettley cut his teeth tattooing horror-related pieces for the past sixteen years. A genre fan since the tender age of eight, he has amassed a devoted clientele who come to him for anything per-

taining to the dark and macabre – be it a black-and-grey mash-up sleeve of horror's most notorious slashers or a photo-realistic colour rendering of a scene from a favourite film. "I think realism is what most people come to me for, but I just didn't want

to pigeonhole into one style," he tells *Rue Morgue*. "If I could describe my tattoos, I would say I'm decent at rendering (realism) and I would call my neo-traditional more 'allegorical macabre' in nature."

ANDREA SUBISSATI

HAVE A GREAT HORROR TAT? SHARE IT WITH US AT: [INFO@RUE-MORGUE.COM](mailto:info@rue-morgue.com).

NEEDFUL THINGS



1 HORRIFIED: UNIVERSAL MONSTERS BOARD GAME \$34.99 USD

Team up with your favourite fiends to protect a town against Universal's classic monsters in this Ravensburger co-op strategy board game! The gang's all here, including Dracula, The Mummy, Frankenstein's monster and his Bride, for 60 minutes of spooky fun for up to five players, aged ten and up. Amazon.com



2 SAM TREE ORNAMENT \$19.99

Care to add some *Trick 'r Treat* to your Christmas tree? Officially licensed and sculpted by Alexander Rey, this resin ornament comes in a collector's window box in case you prefer to display it on your shelf.

TrickOrTreatStudios.com



3 CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST JOGGERS \$28 - \$33 USD

Nothing says health and fitness like an early morning run in the park with these joggers emblazoned with one of the most notorious gore films of all time. Featuring the now-iconic image of a woman impaled on a stake, it'll be the bloodstained classic of your wardrobe.

PallbearerPress.com



4 SCARY STORIES HANDBAG \$82 USD

A haunted house handbag to take a bit of Halloween with you wherever you go! Boasting glow-in-the-dark embellishments and a long crossbody strap, this designer vegan PVC purse is a nightmare come true for freaky fashionistas.

BetseyJohnson.com



5 L.A. SPLASH CLASSIC HORROR LIPSTICK \$16 USD

A stocking stuffer for the glamour ghouls! Inspired by the Golden Age of Horror, these liquid lipsticks evoke your favourite classic monsters in a long-lasting liquid to matte formula. With over sixteen shades to choose from, including the appropriately vampy red "Drac" and cool grey "Werewolf," there's one for every monster maven on your holiday shopping list.

LASplashCosmetics.com



UK-based artist Ricky Leach grew up watching Hammer horror films, which fostered a lifelong interest in monsters, creatures and all things fantastical. Fast forward to adulthood, with Leach perfecting his skills at sculpting, moulding and painting, which landed him a gig at FX company Image Animation (which handled creature FX on the *Hellraiser* film franchise, among others). Two decades into the industry, Leach launched Monsterkits; his own line of original, unpainted model kits, with an eye to offer horror fans a chance to realize their own creative vision at home.

Currently on offer from Monsterkits is an original creation called "Devil and His Sleeping Apprentice," inspired by Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux's marble sculpture "Ugolino and His Sons." Pulled from a custom mould and made-to-order, Leach's version stands ten inches in height, and consists of a solid resin kit that comes in two pieces to be assembled and painted by the buyer. Leach's Satan has a distinctive vulnerable, pensive and sad look and sits upon a chiselled stone seat with his fingers in his mouth while a childlike "apprentice" lies sprawled at his feet amid a pile of human skulls.



This kit goes for \$110 CAD.

Another of Leach's devilish offerings is the horrifying "Fiery Demon Devil." This seven-inch model has a very unique design: eyeless, and emerging from a base of flames, the upper portion of his skull is flayed in half to form two large curving horns. This unpainted kit can be bought for just under \$100 CAD.

Finally, the sculptor shows some literary horror love with his incredibly detailed polyurethane "Lovecraft Cthulhu Resin Kit," depicting the cosmic entity in all his winged, tentacled glory.

"I picked Cthulhu because it's one of those classic creatures," says Leach. "So many artists have their own interpretations that I wanted to have a go at it to add to the many versions out there, so I went for a more organic Cthulhu that was less fantasy/horror in design." Measuring nine inches tall and eleven inches across (including wingspan), the Cthulhu kit comes in four pieces unassembled and is available for \$110 CAD.

Let your creative juices spill at Monsterkits' Etsy shop and on Instagram at @ricky_leach.

CHRIS HAMMOND



In the late 1990s, the Universal Monsters were honoured by the United States Postal Service and appeared on a set of five 32-cent stamps. Comprised of Bela Lugosi as Dracula, Boris Karloff as the Frankenstein Monster and the Mummy, Lon Chaney, Sr. as the Phantom of the Opera and son Lon Chaney, Jr. as the Wolf Man, the stamps featured gorgeous painted illustrations by renowned artist Thomas Blackshear.

Issued alongside the stamps, the USPS also released pins, jumbo-sized postcards, fridge magnets, pencil sets, a stationery kit (with pen, pencil and eraser), a mousepad of the Wolf Man

and a T-shirt of the Frankenstein Monster – all of which employed the same artwork as the stamps. Blackshear's illustrations would also be used as the box art for a set of 12-inch dolls (of the Mummy, Wolf Man and Frankenstein monster) from Kenner/Hasbro.

Complete, unused sheets of twenty stamps can be easily found on eBay and stamp collecting sites for around \$25; while the other USPS items can vary from \$5 to more than \$20 apiece.

JAMES BURRELL

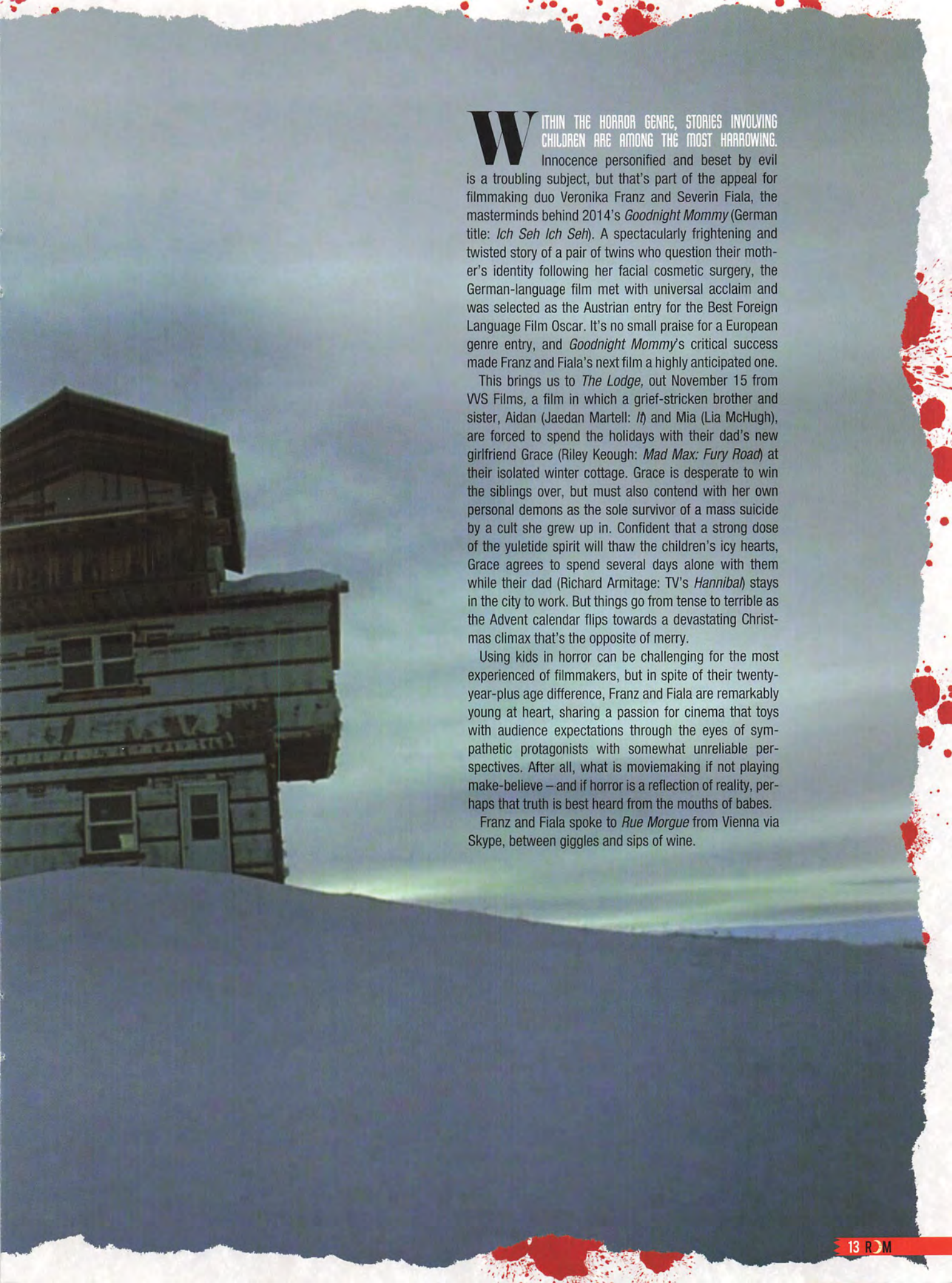


FOLLOWING THEIR STUNNING HORROR DEBUT FEATURE **GOODNIGHT MOMMY**,
AUSTRIAN FILMMAKERS **VERONIKA FRANZ** AND **SEVERIN FIALA** WRAP UP TRAUMA,
FANATICISM, AND ICY ISOLATION WITH A YULETIDE BOW IN **THE LODGE**

HILL FOR THE HOLIDAYS

BY **ANDREA SUBISSATI**





WITHIN THE HORROR GENRE, STORIES INVOLVING CHILDREN ARE AMONG THE MOST HARROWING.

Innocence personified and beset by evil is a troubling subject, but that's part of the appeal for filmmaking duo Veronika Franz and Severin Fiala, the masterminds behind 2014's *Goodnight Mommy* (German title: *Ich Seh Ich Seh*). A spectacularly frightening and twisted story of a pair of twins who question their mother's identity following her facial cosmetic surgery, the German-language film met with universal acclaim and was selected as the Austrian entry for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar. It's no small praise for a European genre entry, and *Goodnight Mommy*'s critical success made Franz and Fiala's next film a highly anticipated one.

This brings us to *The Lodge*, out November 15 from VVS Films, a film in which a grief-stricken brother and sister, Aidan (Jaedan Martell: *It*) and Mia (Lia McHugh), are forced to spend the holidays with their dad's new girlfriend Grace (Riley Keough: *Mad Max: Fury Road*) at their isolated winter cottage. Grace is desperate to win the siblings over, but must also contend with her own personal demons as the sole survivor of a mass suicide by a cult she grew up in. Confident that a strong dose of the yuletide spirit will thaw the children's icy hearts, Grace agrees to spend several days alone with them while their dad (Richard Armitage: TV's *Hannibal*) stays in the city to work. But things go from tense to terrible as the Advent calendar flips towards a devastating Christmas climax that's the opposite of merry.

Using kids in horror can be challenging for the most experienced of filmmakers, but in spite of their twenty-year-plus age difference, Franz and Fiala are remarkably young at heart, sharing a passion for cinema that toys with audience expectations through the eyes of sympathetic protagonists with somewhat unreliable perspectives. After all, what is moviemaking if not playing make-believe—and if horror is a reflection of reality, perhaps that truth is best heard from the mouths of babes.

Franz and Fiala spoke to *Rue Morgue* from Vienna via Skype, between giggles and sips of wine.

How did you two get into filmmaking together?

Veronika Franz: That's a question we ask ourselves sometimes!

Severin Fiala: The story is that I was a huge film fan; I've always been one, but I'm from a small town from the countryside so there just hadn't been the chance for me to watch too many movies. The [local] video store was small and I had seen everything. So Veronika was living in Vienna, Austria's capital, and she happened to need a babysitter. Weirdly enough, she gave me this huge amount of responsibility and I'm still shocked why you would do that, give your child to this fourteen-year-old weird guy from the countryside...

VF: I misjudged you.

SF: But then it was too late to stop. Veronika was a film journalist so she was also into films and she actually paid me in VHS cassettes, which we would watch together.

VF: He was a very cheap babysitter! He would not take any money but some VHS cassettes which we would rent in Viennese video stores, which still existed back then. When I came home late, at twelve or one in the morning, he would still be watching his film, so I would join him and we would watch films together and we found out that we liked the same movies. This was kind of strange, of course, because our age difference is like twenty years. It was stranger for him, maybe, than for me.

SF: I was lucky because you were the only grown-up person who knew David Cronenberg and John Carpenter and people like that, so that was weird but in a good way. It was still a long way to go before we started making movies together, but it started our friendship. And we knew that we could trust each other when it comes to movies. You trusted me with your child, which is good enough for me.

Describe your working relationship. Who does what?

SF: We do everything together, decide everything together. Like writing, we're literally sitting together in front of the laptop and swapping the laptop back and forth, and same with directing. Of course, only one talks to the actors [at a time] but it could be either one of us and, for the next scene, maybe it's the other one. I feel like we maybe even get an extra [benefit] out of that because one talks to the actors and if [their performance] doesn't get better in consecutive takes, then the other one can step in. We know that we want to achieve the same thing, so it's just a different kind of phrasing of where you want to go with the actors or the cinematography, but we ultimately always trust each other.

Are you more influenced by European or North American horror cinema?

VF: We are influenced by good films from wherever.



"WE DO EVERYTHING TOGETHER, DECIDE EVERYTHING TOGETHER. LIKE WRITING, WE'RE LITERALLY SITTING TOGETHER IN FRONT OF THE LAPTOP AND SWAPPING THE LAPTOP BACK AND FORTH, AND SAME WITH DIRECTING."

—SEVERIN FIALA

SF: It's a good question but I think it depends, because we're also very much into film history and I think it depends on the era we're talking about. Because with silent films, there are many very great German expressionist horror movies. In Europe, there were amazing things going on back then and then when it comes to the '50s, we would say old Hammer movies that everyone loves. And when it comes to the '60s and early '70s, we would have said Italy was the most influential country for horror movies. Then it was the United States, so I think it's always a question of what moment in time we're in.

VF: *Bunny Lake is Missing* and Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* have some of the most impressive endings, for me, in film history. Very touching and mysterious...

SF: ...and shocking in a deeply emotional way, because it comes out of the characters and the whole buildup towards those endings really pays off in the emotional sense. It's what we always hope to achieve. It's like, the opposite of a [plot] twist for a twist's sake, or for conventional horror's sake, it really comes deeply out of the characters and the story that's been cooked up.

How would you describe your style of filmmaking?

SF: When it comes to making movies, Veronika is a screenwriter and collaborator of a very famous Austrian artist/director called Ulrich Seidl. He comes from a documentary background, in a way, so I think what Veronika learned from that, or what they developed together and what's also important in our cinema, is that whatever the characters do, or whatever dark [directions] the story goes, it should never totally leave the

grounds of reality. So we always want to start with real people and real emotions and we think that essentially makes the horror stronger because you can connect to it more if it still feels human.

VF: This is one part, and the other part is that we are really into atmosphere, so when we write or read a script, we always look for something which is almost without words, like a silent film.

SF: I think visual storytelling actually defines 'our cinema,' because this is what I think attracts some people very strongly. Others hate it because it simply takes more time to tell a story that way. It's slower and the audience has to do some work and some people just don't [like to do that].

The Lodge is your first English-language feature. What was it like to make a movie in Canada/USA versus your native Austria?

SF: It was very different, for many reasons. In Austria, all films are state-funded so it's more like an art fund that you apply for and there's different juries and it's kind of hard to get the money, but once you have the money you're relatively free to do whatever you want with it – as long as you don't need more or spend more than you have. Obviously if it's private money, or if it's a company investing the money, it's a different thing, so that's just one very basic difference. [Another difference] would be that you can make films with a rather small team, whereas in Canada and the US the unions are very strong, so you have to hire people even if you don't need them – that was also unusual for us. But on the other hand are the actors, because there are so many really amazing actors for cinema in the

US, which is not a thing in Austria [because it is] a more theatre-based country, so that was really great. Also, we loved the Montreal crew, because they also had this art house film background, and they're super professional due to the Hollywood productions that they're doing and they're constantly working, so we were in good hands with those people. And not only in good professional hands but they also could discuss Tarkovsky or philosophy, like Hegel or Kant, at three in the morning at the bar, which is very unusual and great for us.

How did you like shooting on 35mm in the dead of Montreal winter?

SF: Actually, I think it's the only kind of technical thing that survives such low temperatures. I think with digital, you would have gotten into more trouble much earlier on. We're really bad with everything that is electronic — really, we can touch a digital camera and it's gone forever in an instant without us knowing why. But [working on] 35 makes you much more focused due to the limited resources you have; there is not endless amounts of film stock and so everyone is more focused when you shoot on film, which we truly love. It's the way film shooting is meant to be.

Your previous film, Goodnight Mommy, is told from the perspective of children, and The Lodge takes that slant partially as well. What makes a child's perspective so interesting and unique?

VF: We like children and how children look at the world, because they bring their innocence with them. Whatever they do, however they behave, whatever they see, it's always with pure souls, and this makes it so touching to me. We share a lot [with children]; we like to play, and also when we write scripts, for us, it's kind of a game. We try to compete, who has the better idea? For us, it's like playing, it's like inventing something. And we also like to play games with the kids when we shoot, and we like working with kids. For us, it's easier than with adults because with kids it's very direct. If you tell them something and they do it wrong, you know you have told them something wrong, because kids will always try to do what you ask them to. They are very honest.

SF: We also look for actors who are a bit like kids.

Grace makes a very interesting and complex protagonist given her backstory as the lone survivor of a religious cult's mass suicide. Why was this backdrop important for her character?

SF: I think it plays into one of the larger themes of the whole movie, which is past trauma and how you try to overcome it, and what kind of mistakes you might make trying to overcome it. So it's very important to us that no one in this movie is actually a bad person, or a monster, in



A Frosty Festus: Richard (Richard Armitage) hopes the holidays will bring his kids closer to his lonely fiancée Grace (Riley Keough).

"WE WANTED TO MAKE A HORROR FILM WITHOUT A MONSTER, IN A WAY, WHERE YOU HAVE THE SHADES OF GREY AND EVERYONE IS GOOD AND BAD AND THERE ISN'T ONE EVIL THAT YOU HAVE TO FACE."

— VERONIKA FRANZ

a conventional horror film sense. [The characters are] all hurt.

VF: We wanted to make a horror film without a monster, in a way, where you have the shades of grey and everyone is good and bad and there isn't one evil that you have to face.

One thing that Grace and the children share is a complicated relationship with religion, where organized religion is a source of pain and intolerance rather than compassion and

love. I get the sense that this soulless religious devotion is the actual villain here — would you agree?

VF: We would say dogmatism, maybe. We would maybe put it larger, because you find dogmatism not only in religion.

SF: It's not one specific religion we want to talk about, but it's a general approach to faith and how to corrupt it, in a way. I think every religion, at some point, if it gets too extreme can go that far. So for us it's important that the film isn't just about one very weird cult or something, but it's a general approach to faith and life and how to corrupt it.

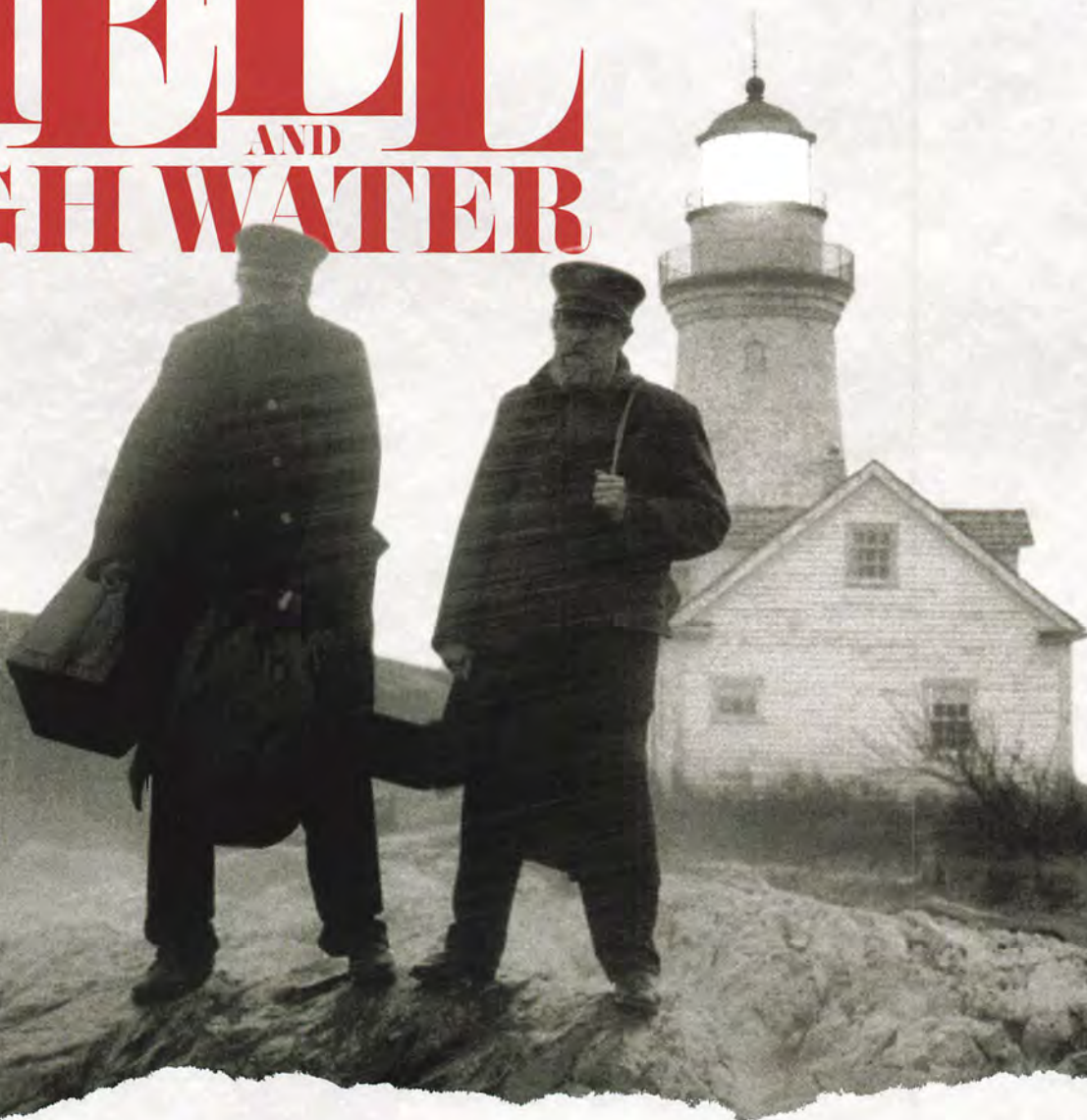
The extreme isolation is almost a character in itself; was it a practical plot point to set the story in the winter wilderness or a stylistic one, because it's also very beautiful?

SF: I think it's both. We're not fans of something that's only there for the plot. I mean, it's necessary for the plot that they're isolated, but we also feel that, as long as it really resonates with their emotional situation, like being cut off in this cold purgatory or hell situation. So we felt it was a

ROBERT EGGERS' NEW MARITIME HORROR, **THE LIGHTHOUSE**, IS A SPIRITUAL BROTHER TO **THE WITCH** — AN OCEANSIDE FOLK TALE OF MASCULINITY, MADNESS, AND THE ENDLESSNESS OF THE SEA

HELL AND HIGH WATER

BY ANDREA SUBISSATI



ON A REMOTE OUTPOST OFF THE COAST OF MAINE IN THE 1890s STANDS A Lighthouse maintained by two men: seasoned seaman Thomas Wake (Willem Dafoe) with a tongue as coarse as the hair beneath his cap, and his underling Ephraim Winslow (Robert Pattinson), a brooding drifter with a mysterious past. As captain of the outpost and bootleg vodka zealot, Wake spends his daytime hours berating Winslow or sleeping off last night's drunken haze; at night, he tends to the lighthouse's beacon, whose hypnotic brilliance captivates him to the point of rapture. Winslow, too, is enthralled by the beacon, but is forbidden by Wake to go anywhere near it. As the weeks wear on, the pair's relationship turns like the tide from cordial co-workers to uneasy friends. Pushed to the brink of sanity by isolation, alcohol, salt and shame, Winslow and Wake slowly spill their beans, and the resulting tidal wave may overcome both men forever.

Such is the yarn of *The Lighthouse*, Robert Eggers' brackish, supernaturally-tinged folk horror that conjures the weird tales of Arthur Machen,

Algernon Blackwood and M.R. James. With subject matter as bleak as its salty, black-and-white palette, and a pair of charismatic leads whose faces hypnotize even as they are hypnotized, this is a briny, Lovecraftian nightmare for which horror fans should batten down the hatches.

Penned by Eggers along with his brother Max, *The Lighthouse* is his highly anticipated follow-up to *The Witch*, but this wasn't always the plan. Rumours about his next project swirled, and included a remake of F.W. Murnau's 1922 silent film *Nosferatu* and a TV series based on Rasputin.

"The fates spin a curious thread for everyone," Eggers tells *Rue Morgue*. "I had developed several larger things that didn't end up happening, but all the while my brother and I were working on this in our back pocket. I'm quite pleased that this is my second feature, but there are many times where I thought many interesting things were going to be my second feature."

Certainly, it's easy to imagine that Eggers was spoiled for choice for his

sophomore film — *The Witch*, a terrifying and sumptuously-shot period drama that was an early harbinger for the current wave of folk horror movies, made huge waves in 2015.

For *The Lighthouse*, Eggers enlisted the services of some of the talent who helped bring *The Witch* to life, notably cinematographer Jarin Blaschke, costume designer Linda Muir, and composer Mark Korven, the man who gave *The Witch* its aura of evil.

"I was trying to stay away from strings," says Eggers of *The Lighthouse*'s eerie sonic landscape. "Originally, I wanted zero strings in the score; that didn't happen. There are certainly places where there's actually even more of a traditional kind of movie score — Bernard Herrmann-esque kinds of things to hang your coat on. But we tried, for the moments of high tension, to get away from the Penderecki screechy string stuff. And even when we do have strings in moments like that, we're trying to find textures that don't sound like strings. I'm really quite proud of the [*Lighthouse*] score; I think *The Witch* score is fantastic, but this is more unique."

Also unique is the 1:19:1 aspect ratio used for the film: a nearly square frame that harkens back to the period of cinema dominated by filmmakers Fritz Lang and G.W. Pabst. For Eggers, this decision was as practical as it was aesthetic.

"The 1:19:1 aspect ratio is a rare early sound aspect ratio and so it would transport us to early cinema and a visual language closer to the 1890s," he explains, "but also, we're shooting vertical objects and cramped spaces so I actually think it was a very good aspect ratio to tell this story. [G.W.] Pabst made a film called *Kameradschaft* that took place in a mine and I think this film and Pabst's film are probably the only movies that should be photographed in this aspect ratio. Obviously, there's incredibly perfectly framed films in 1:19:1 but I imagine if Fritz Lang could have made some of his films in a wider aspect ratio and still have them resound, he would have."

Another trick in Eggers' visual toolkit was the use of 1930s Baltar lenses to augment the natural shimmer of water and glass. These lenses were especially critical when it came to capturing the magnificent lighthouse beacon that bewitches the two characters — a vintage working Fresnel lens known as "the invention that saved a million ships." Culled from a lighthouse in Point Cabrillo, California, that dates back to 1909, the multifaceted lens was designed for optimum reflective capacity, allowing light to be visible across great distances. In addition to lending *The Lighthouse* even more historical authenticity, the Fresnel lens is part of what inspired Eggers to tackle the seaside tale in the first place.

"I wanted the foghorn, but I also wanted to have a Fresnel lens, which is the big jewel in the middle of the beacon," says Eggers. "I felt that that was iconic as well, and I also wanted something in the plot device to have a mystery within



Of Mice And Mariners: Thomas (Willem Dafoe) and Ephraim (Robert Pattinson) struggle to keep their personal demons at bay in *The Lighthouse*.

the light, and so having something that looks like it's from outer space and also a period-accurate object seemed like a good idea."

Of course, while Eggers is already known for pitch-perfect spoken dialect and sets that are flawlessly faithful to the era, *The Witch* was also celebrated for its thoughtful rumination on the perils of puritanism and what happens when feminine nature is conflated with sin. *The Lighthouse* presents a compelling flipside to *The Witch*'s narrative, where the chain of command between two men is complicated by the masculine imperative of detached emotional discipline.

"Nothing good happens when two men are trapped in a giant phallus," Eggers remarks. "I guess my answer would be a long, meandering one but, certainly, it's all about power dynamics."

That's not to say that filmgoers should approach *The Lighthouse* as a message in a bottle — for Eggers, thematic interpretations may vary,

but it all starts with the story.

"There is a comment about white, toxic, heteronormative masculinity," he allows. "With *The Witch*, I was trying to tell a story about a

witch, and here, I was trying to tell a story about a lighthouse, and then in the creation of it, things happen. I certainly never start with a message or intend a message, and even talking about themes of feminine empowerment in *The Witch* or themes of impotent masculinity in *The Lighthouse*, I hope there's more going on than that. I used to direct a lot of Shakespeare and I think it always became about using one of Shakespeare's plays to say something about the cur-

rent social climate in a really pointed way, and while *Othello* is certainly a play about race, it's so much more than that, and if you made it only about race you ruin the material. All the ambiguities in storytelling are what make it satisfying for me."





On *Thin Ice*: The hostile winter weather conditions are a critical element to Grace's isolation and precarious sanity.

really appropriate setting for the story. We could go further and say that we not only wanted the whole thing to look isolated in the film, but we were actually looking for a place that was *really* isolated, that has all those qualities that you really can't get away from easily.

VF: As you said, it's also stylistically and visually beautiful. We also owe that to our cinematographer [Thimios Bakatakis] because he's also part of the process. We wanted to have [the film] more colourful in the beginning of the film, and then when we come to the lodge and as the story goes on, it loses its colour; it ends up almost black and white. This was one of our first ideas.

SF: We wanted the film to lose its colour in a natural way, and that's also a really good thing about Thimios, because he hates everything that feels fake. So he would never overdo anything in colour correction or in set design.

Goodnight Mommy is being remade in English, with both of you on board as executive producers. Will the remake's plot twist differ at all from the original?

VF: We only met the screenwriter and the director once, so far. We are talking to a producer but we haven't read a draft yet, they told us [we'll see it] in the upcoming weeks.

SF: I think the plot will not change dramatically but I think it's Americanized in the sense that it fits U.S. society better than our thing, I guess. People always ask us if [the remake is] a good thing, or if we're afraid what they'll do, but we're actually curious about this and excited to see what other people make of it.

What are your thoughts on Americanized remakes in general?

SF: Usually, they're not as good because they

want to play it safer. They do the same [story] but in a safer way and more boring way. In cinema, we love to be attacked, to be shocked, [to take] the most difficult journeys. The easier the journey, the broader and flatter the road we're walking on, the more boring it is for us. But there are interesting remakes, for example *Let the Right One In* – I prefer the European version but the American one is still carefully done and it's still a good film. So there are some [remakes] that hold up but, in general, if you do something and try to play it safer than the original, there's a good chance that it's going to be less interesting.

What can you tell us about your next project, The Devil's Bath?

VF: It's a very dark period piece about a true historical phenomenon that took place in the 18th century all over Europe. It's about women who, for whatever reason, want to kill themselves, but suicide was [considered] the worst thing in the world at the time. So if you killed yourself, you would go to Hell – you would not even get buried, your relatives and parents were doomed. It was worse than killing someone else...

SF: Because you can't repent for your sin, because the moment you commit suicide, you're dead, so you can't confess afterwards. That's why it's the worst crime.

VF: That's the premise. So people came up with the idea to kill someone else to get executed for

that crime, so they could repent before death, they could repent their sins and still have the chance to go to Heaven or purgatory, maybe. We found an American historian, she lives in San Francisco – it's her lifetime [area of study] and she has collected 300 cases. She opened her archive to us. We could read all these private reports where these women tell about their lives, and why they [committed murder], so we wrote

the script based on those articles. There's this cliché of women not using physical violence, [opting to use] poison or whatever; I like the idea that these women actually killed other people very brutally, and also children, by cutting their throats. [This] was not that unusual back then, because you had to kill all the animals you wanted to eat, so [people] kind of had to be able to do all that. Death played a larger part in your life than in our day. We also like

this idea that it's a part of history you don't know about. Female history kind of doesn't exist, what they tell you in school is written by men, recorded by men.

SF: Even more than that, [*The Devil's Bath*] is about people who are not [powerful]. History is always about the kings and emperors and it's never about poor people, or ordinary people, and that's why we were so touched by reading all those protocols. 🍷



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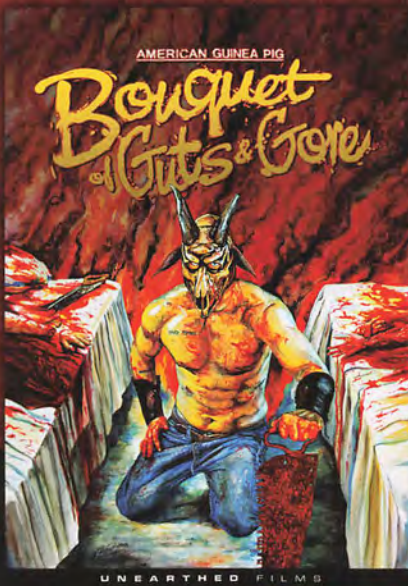
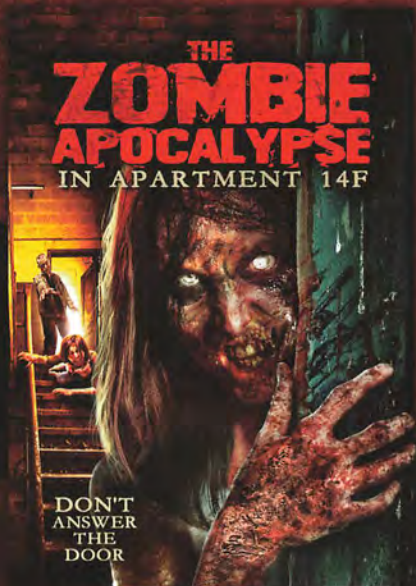
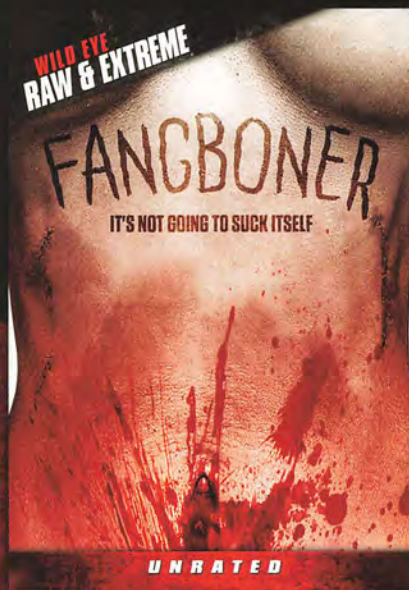
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ROOTS OF EVIL

by Rocco Thompson



HORROR HAS LONG BEEN THE TARGET OF MORAL CRUSADERS WHO BLAME GENRE MOVIES AND BOOKS FOR REAL-LIFE VIOLENCE, and a recent wave of mass shootings in the U.S. has helped exhumate the debate for a new era. Despite what numerous statistics and studies report about the tenuous-to-non-existent connection between on-screen cruelty and real-life bloodshed, believers would rather click their tongues at the entertainment industry thereby giving life to an unlikely boogeyman: a climate of moral panic that has coloured the country's socio-ethical attitude since its founding.

Moral panics – defined as any “mass movement based on the false or exaggerated perception that some cultural behaviour or group of people is dangerously deviant and poses a threat to society's values and interests” – include everything from McCarthyism to the modern-day Momo Challenge. The term was coined by sociologist Stanley Conan, who studied the way in which the media sensationalized the clash between the U.K.'s “mods” and “rockers” subcultures in the 1960s, blaming them for everything from rising teen pregnancy to amphetamine abuse, despite the apparent lack of influence on the wider culture at large.

But it wasn't always a rebellious youth group that had moralists sharp-

ening their pitchforks: from its infancy, cinema was seen as a corrupting influence. One of the first films screened commercially to the public, 1896's *The Kiss*, depicted two actors chastely pressing lips and was yet among the earliest in a long line of works to be denounced by the Roman Catholic Church for obscenity. Later, when horror became the cinematic genre *du jour* for post-WWI America, Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931) had its epilogue excised for fear that it encouraged belief in the supernatural, and James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) suffered cuts by many state censorship boards, specifically the “blasphemous” scene in which the mad doctor declares, “Now I know what it feels like to be God!”

Despite instances like these, the film industry remained something of a Wild West in terms of what could and could not be shown, until 1934 when the Motion Picture Production Code came to be strictly enforced. Spearheaded by former Republican Party chairman Will H. Hays' attempts to clean up Hollywood's image following the 1921 rape and murder of actress Virginia Rappe, the Hays Code was also a response to the chorus of religious groups calling for censorship of an emerging art form that they believed glamorized and promoted bad behaviour. By 1954, however, American viewers grew more permissive and racy foreign films and TV began



Age Of Outrage: Some of cinema's most scandalous moral offenders over the years include (clockwise from top right) William Heise's *The Kiss* (1896), Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931), and Sean Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* (1980).

to steal audience attention, loosening the Code's grip. This opened the floodgates for directors to set new standards of provocation and onscreen violence after years of suppression. But it wasn't Hitchcock's taboo-busting *Psycho* (1960), the invention of "splatter" cinema by Herschell Gordon Lewis, or even Romero's incendiary *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) that would spark the 20th century's biggest moral crusade; it was a fairly conservative horror film aimed squarely at the hearts of the faithful – William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973).

In a way, Hays' insistence that movies could adversely affect their audiences was proven true when the film surpassed all expectations to become a box-office and cultural juggernaut, dooming an entire generation to sleepless nights with the lights on. Based on the book by Roman Catholic William Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist* was a critical reminder that, not only was the Devil very much alive, he was after your children. After the social movements and upheavals that characterized the previous decade, the film was a harbinger of the gathering conservative wave that would crash with force in the 1980s, where the Christian Right would rally against feminism, gay liberation, civil rights, and, of course, obscene movies. This growing paranoia bloomed into a full-blown panic in 1983 with the McMartin preschool trial, where claims of satanic ritual abuse led to a virulent spread of more than 100 similar allegations at preschools throughout the country, all of which were eventually disproven.

If *The Exorcist* didn't give parents of the 1980s enough cause for concern, there was also the popularity of slasher movies and faux snuff films to contend with. While the U.K.'s "Video Nasty" crusade imposed draconian laws on the burgeoning video store, American censors cut films to ribbons to remove all traces of blood 'n' guts. Even the critical establishment grew puritanical – not only did Roger Ebert roundly denounce *Fri-*

day the 13th (1980), but went so far as to spoil its third act reveal while encouraging audiences to write letters of complaint to both Paramount and actress Betsy Palmer. When *Silent Night, Deadly Night* (1984) sparked actual protests, Ebert and Gene Siskel read aloud the names of everyone who worked on the film on their hit TV show *At the Movies* before declaring "shame on you!" The two eventually devoted an entire episode to denigrating slashers, which they condescendingly dubbed "women in danger" films. (Perhaps Ebert the moral crusader should have taken up his grievances with Ebert the screenwriter, who penned 1970's *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* – a film that, among its many prurient pleasures – features the death of Erica Gavin by deep-throating the barrel of a handgun, one of the most grotesquely sexualized deaths to appear onscreen.)

By the 1990s, Jason Voorhees and the Devil faded from the cultural crosshairs to be supplanted by a new threat to the delicate minds of America: video games. When interactive slasher *Night Trap* and the famously gory *Mortal Kombat* debuted in 1992, electronic entertainment leaped to the fore as the biggest moral scapegoat of the Clinton-era and beyond, putting horror movies on the back burner.

Of course, 21st-century moral crusaders will still blame the movies when it suits them. The most recent example is Blumhouse's *The Hunt*, a film in which a cabal of "liberal elites" kill a pack of red state deplorables for sport. After 2019's mass shooting in El Paso, the film became an easy target for Fox News, allowing the calls for gun control and fears about anti-immigrant sentiment to be crushed beneath the violence-as-entertainment debate once again. The studio chose to can the film for the time being,

but the similarly ammunition-happy films *Ready or Not*, *3 From Hell*, and *Rambo: Last Blood* have all been released with nary a peep. Violent movies, it would seem, are permissible, as long as you and yours aren't on the receiving end of the gunfire.

To quote a statement from the American Psychological Association, "Scant evidence has emerged that makes any causal or correlational connection between playing violent video games and actually committing violent activities." Chris Ferguson, a psychology professor who developed the statement, claims that the same goes for other forms of media, joking that "The data on bananas causing suicide is about as conclusive. Literally. The numbers work out about the same."

Yet, horror movies and violent media are still subject to scrutiny in the unending search for the cause of the country's moral decline, despite the failure of countless campaigns against them. It's fitting that the term "witch-hunt" has so forcefully re-entered the political lexicon, because even 300 years after America's foundational moral panic, they've never *really* stopped hunting scapegoats. Students of media have been taught for decades that art imitates culture, not

the other way around, and horror outpaces almost any other genre in its ability to serve as cultural commentary. What will the blood-soaked cinematic nightmares of tomorrow say about the failure to protect citizens from real-world violence? From slashers to torture porn, to today's "social thrillers," horror fans know what the moralists don't: that the media we consume is a mirror that shows us who we are, and though we may beat our fists bloody against it, it doesn't make the reflection any less ugly. 🩸



CAN HORROR MOVIES LURE THE YOUNG AND IMPRESSIONABLE INTO COMMITTING CRIME?
IT'S AN ARGUMENT AS OLD AS THE HILLS AND AS CONTEMPORARY AS RIGHT NOW

BEWARE THE GOTHOMANIACS!

by Sarah Cleary



WE'VE ALL HEARD THE STORY: LOVING PARENT SITS IMPRESSIONABLE CHILD IN FRONT OF THE TV AND POPS IN *TOY STORY*, BLISSFULLY UNAWARE THAT

SOMEONE HAD SWITCHED IT OUT FOR A COPY OF *SAW*. Thirty minutes later, said parent comes to check up on the kid, only to find them wide eyed and traumatized. The story inevitably gets splashed across headlines, kicking up a dust storm about the evils of the horror genre and how bad it is for society. But the question needs to be asked: why does the media still make such a fuss over these events? Could it be because there is a latent fear and disgust within society of the very juxtaposition between horror and children?

Though seemingly progressive and sophisticated, contemporary society still retains an archaic fear that certain cultural products have an intrinsic ability to harm, leading to almost a century of research into the alleged negative effects of horror and violent material. While the media certainly plays a role in sensationalizing these alleged effects, dormant societal fears about the corruptive power of horror still lies in wait, resurrected in the wake of seemingly inexplicable bouts of violence among youth. The sudden and staggering frequency of events, particularly school shootings, make the argument against horror seem new and urgent, but it's a fight that's been festering since the dawn of literature.

Nineteenth-century critics described the Gothic, horror's literary precursor, as something like a "virus" capable of corrupting young minds with

"gross improbabilities." An 1802 review of Charlotte Dacre's supernatural novel *Zofloya* condemned the book for filling young minds with "horrid ideas" and considered whether hospitalization was needed for readers of Gothic fiction. On foot of such criticism, and charged with both a class and taste bias, the term "Gothomania," a disorder in which young people developed an unnatural interest in the macabre, was coined as a way to legitimize an otherwise unjustified disdain for a new wave of sensational fiction at odds with 19th-century moral values. Thus, a dangerous correlation between the Gothic and disease was established, one that persists to this day.

As the horror genre enjoyed something of a Golden Age in Hollywood cinema of the 1930s, the juxtaposition between horror, ill health and children was becoming an increasingly hot topic. For example, the industry paper *Motion Picture* warned that children and "nervous people" should not be allowed see James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931). This sentiment was again advanced in a 1932 review of Tod Browning's *Freaks*, stating that it certainly was not a feature for kids, and the only thing that was to be gained by seeing it was bad dreams and a bad taste in one's mouth.

While both the Catholic Church and various moral crusaders became actively entrenched in child-centric censorship, it was the 1933 publication of the Payne Fund Studies research, otherwise known as *Our Movie Made Children*, which brought overwhelming public attention to the alleged threat of cinema to those underage, while setting a dangerous precedent

for publishing sensational results about media effects extrapolated from flawed research. Authored by Henry Forman, the book jumps from one presumption to the next in its quest to denounce the movie industry, employing an overly dramatic tone describing the manner in which films controlled and altered an individual's morality as "emotional possession."

While Forman's claims and actions were outlandish, some twenty years later, horror comic books would befall a similar fate. Embroiled in a nationwide witch-hunt, countless horror comics were quite literally burned at the stake as an alleged negative influence on American children. While not convinced that comics in their entirety should be banned, the liberal-leaning psychiatrist Fredric Wertham isolated horror as a corruptive presence within the lives of children. Finding himself at the centre of this controversy, EC comics publisher William Gaines gave testimony in defence of his horror titles as part of the 1954 Senate Subcommittee hearings into Juvenile Delinquency.

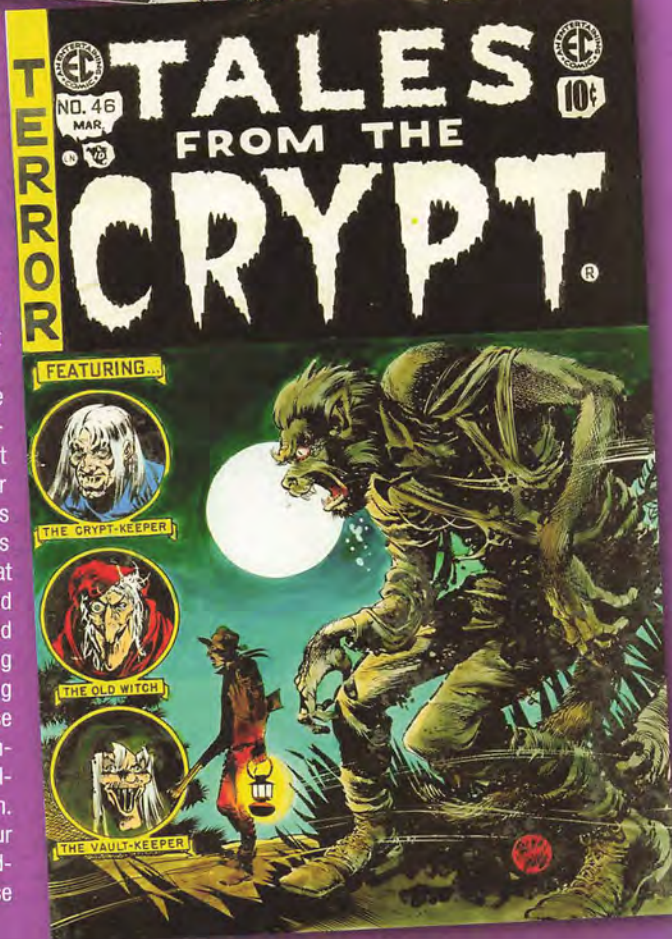
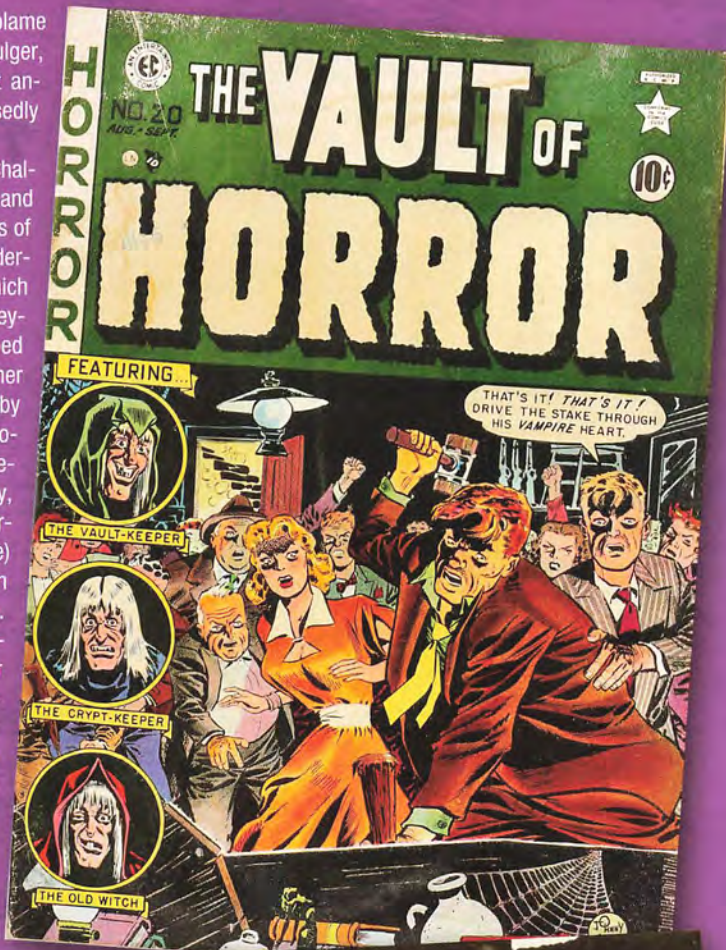
Considered as nothing more than a "symbolic show trial," the hearings were a political vehicle that demonstrated concern in the search for an apparent "cure" for juvenile delinquency, while attempting to regulate the tastes and interests of an increasingly important consumer demographic – children. Though it was concluded that comics did not contribute to delinquency, the result of these hearings effectively made it impossible for EC and others to continue publishing horror titles.

The residual paranoia regarding the connection between horror and corruption of youth reared its ugly head once more in the early '90s, with the murder of toddler James Bulger in 1993 at the hands of ten-year-old boys Robert Thompson and Jon Venables in Liverpool. Searching Venables' father's video account, investigators discovered that he had rented *Child's Play 3* some months before the murder. While Venables admitted he had never seen the film, that didn't stop the courts and – more damaging – the media from controlling the narrative. With headlines such as "At Last Experts Admit: Movie Nasties Do Kill," "Top Psychologists have finally admitted that violent videos corrupt children" and "Vid Nasties: We Boobed, Say Experts," video

nasties were apparently to blame for not only the death of Bulger, but contributed towards yet another generation of supposedly dysfunctional children.

Antecedent to the Momo Challenge panic earlier this year and reminiscent in some respects of the Bulger case, the Slenderman Stabbing of 2014 in which twelve-year-olds Morgan Geyser and Anissa Weier stabbed school friend Payton Leutner and left her for dead in nearby woods, invoked similar controversy. Comparable to the media representations of Chucky, Slenderman was (and to a certain extent, continues to be) treated as the personification of a larger threat to children. While it was extensively documented that both Geyser and Weier had a fascination with Slenderman, what wasn't properly explored in the media was that both girls suffered from debilitating mental health issues, compromising their ability to differentiate between fact and fiction, leading to a perfect storm of mental illness and co-dependence. But instead of taking this opportunity to de-stigmatize schizophrenia and open up a much-needed dialogue about children and mental health, in its search for a motive for murder, the public chose witchcraft.

And so, we find ourselves once again enduring political grandstanding claiming that video games and horror movies corrupt children, but we've heard all this before, and before that, and before that. Has the theory ever been categorically proven that horror harms kids? The short answer is no. Despite headline after headline, no conclusive evidence has ever been found that horror motivates children to commit crime. But that hasn't stopped the same unfounded narratives of harm from being trotted out time and time again, pathologizing horror in children's lives as something insidious, unfairly rendering those such as ourselves with a vested interest in the genre as perverse facilitators in this circle of alleged harm. Two hundred years on, amidst all our so-called scientific and cultural advances, as a society, we still choose Gothamania. 🖤



IF YOU THINK *A SERBIAN FILM* OR RUGGERO DEODATO'S *CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST* HOLD THE MOST NOTORIETY FOR CAUSING OUTRAGE, YOU'D BE WRONG. CONTROVERSIAL AS THEY WERE, THE MOST NOTABLE MOMENTS OF PEAK MORAL OUTRAGE ARE THE ONES WHERE THE GENRE CROSSED INTO THE MAINSTREAM...

PANIC ATTACK

by Benoit Black

FREAKS RUINS TOD BROWNING

Despite the success of *Dracula*, *The Unholy Three* and *London After Midnight*, the Hollywood industry felt Tod Browning crossed a line with his 1932 release, *Freaks*. The film suffered many cuts and was even banned in the United Kingdom for three decades. His career derailed, Browning found himself unable to get his projects greenlit, and all his movies produced afterwards were financially unsuccessful and not well received.

PEEPING TOM DESTROYS MICHAEL POWELL'S CAREER

Few would have heard of British filmmaker Michael Powell and his movie *Peeping Tom* were it not for the praise of other filmmakers such as Martin Scorsese. The reason you haven't heard of Powell is because his promising career came to a dead stop upon the release of his 1960 film, which might be the first slasher film in history. Daring to cross lines that even *Psycho* would (or could) not, *Peeping Tom* is a look into the mind of a madman from the inside. Audiences could not accept such an uncompromising vision and the critical backlash effectively terminated Powell's future as a filmmaker.

DAVID LYNCH CREATES A NATIONAL CRITICAL FIRESTORM

Back in 1986, David Lynch was still making a name for himself with his movie *Blue Velvet*, which managed to offend pretty much everybody in the film business. Undoubtedly it was scenes of Isabella Rossellini — daughter of famed Hollywood star Ingrid Bergman — taking a beating at the hands of a deranged Dennis Hopper that tipped the scales for many, including film pundits Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert, who were effectively a two-man IMDb at the time. The duo gave the film some harsh finger-wagging before delivering the dreaded two-thumbs-down rating, but Lynch and company took it in stride, incorporating the review into posters with the tagline: "Two more reasons you should watch *Blue Velvet*." The rest is history.

SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT WRECKS CHRISTMAS '84

At the height of the slasher craze, producers took aim at summer camp, prom night, birthdays and holidays, but when this film recast Saint Nick as a murderous madman, concerned parents felt enough was enough. Apparently, the



image of an axe-wielding Santa Claus making his way down a chimney was too traumatic for tots, or so the thinking went. Parents picketed theatres, not realizing that their public ire only amounted to free publicity for the movie. The franchise went on to include five sequels.

GUINEA PIG TRAUMATIZES CHARLIE SHEEN

Before he was "winning," Charlie Sheen was on a losing streak, and none hit so hard as when his friend lent him a battered VHS copy of *Guinea Pig 2: Flower of Flesh and Blood*. Poor Charlie thought he was watching footage of a real-life homicide and, in a rare display of moral outrage, immediately reported it to the FBI.

Guinea Pig became an overnight news sensation, bringing negative attention to the genre, but none can deny that the series benefitted from Charlie's panicked phone call.

MARILYN MANSON BLAMED FOR COLUMBINE KILLINGS

It's laughable to think now, but back in the day, the self-proclaimed "Antichrist Superstar" was the boogeyman *du jour* upon whom the ills of society were neatly pinned. And none were so ill as Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, who massacred classmates at Columbine High before taking their own lives in 1999. Furious citizens rallied against Manson, whose egotist antics and demonic garb seemed to embody the killers' philosophy. Manson cancelled his tour out of respect for the victims, but his career suffered in spite of those who still think it was

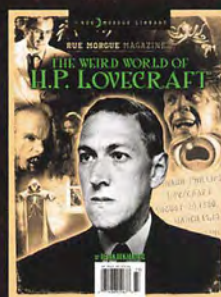
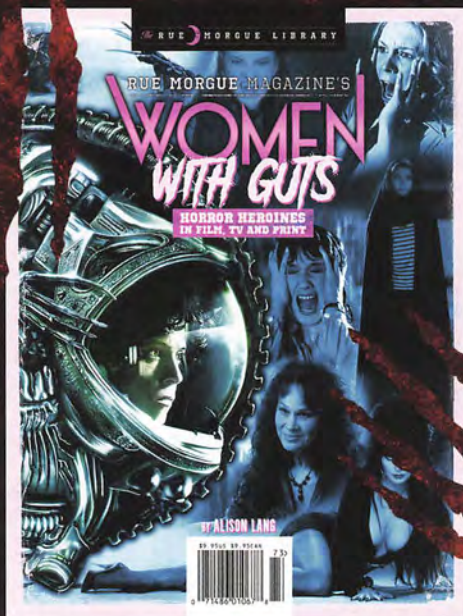
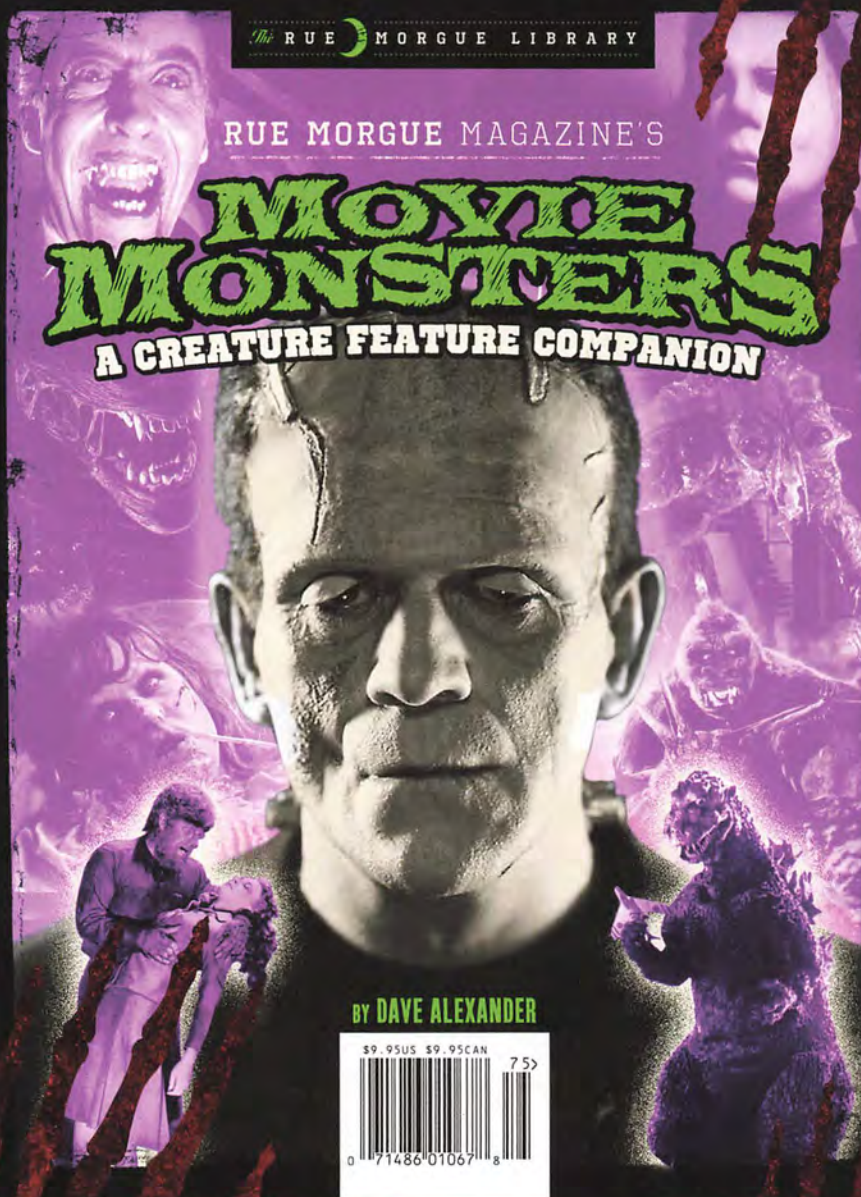
great publicity for him. It wasn't.

DOOM BLAMED FOR EVERYTHING

Murder, mayhem, unfinished homework... id Software's 1993 title *Doom* brought concerned parents out in droves armed with quotable psychologists who insisted that the bloodsoaked first-person shooter was causing mental harm to anyone who played it. It didn't help that the Columbine High School killers were extremely fond of the game, with its endless arsenal of weapons, demonic imagery and first-person POV. The outrage made headlines and spawned at least one documentary, undoubtedly contributing to *Doom*'s position as one of the most popular horror games of all time. ☹️

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WELCOME TO THE REPEATING TRAGEDY OF
JOHANNES NYHOLM'S SLAPSTICK
HORROR NIGHTMARE

KOKO-DI KOKO-DA

BY
MICHAEL
GINGOLD

CONFESSION: WHEN THE TITLE *KOKO-DI KOKO-DA* CAME UP AT THIS YEAR'S FANTASIA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, I assumed it was some kind of whimsical anime and passed it over. I soon realized my mistake: *Koko-di Koko-da* is the polar opposite of lighthearted. The second feature by Swedish filmmaker/ animator Johannes Nyholm is a brooding, starkly horrific, deeply metaphorical study of guilt and psychological trauma. After taking Fantasia's Camera Lucida award and winning praise at numerous other festivals this year, it sees U.S. theatrical release, followed by VOD exposure, beginning in November from Dark Star Pictures.



Koko-di Koko-da takes its title from a traditional French lullaby that is sung in the film's opening minutes by Mog (Peter Belli), a sinister showman in a white suit who leads a pair of strange followers through a forest. The focus then turns to Tobias (Leif Edlund Johansson) and Elin (Ylva Gallon), a happily married couple with a young daughter, Maja (Katarina Jacobson). That happiness is shattered by Maja's tragic death, and three years later, their marriage is a shadow of its former self. In an attempt to repair their relationship, Tobias and Elin go on a camping trip in remote woods, where they are assaulted by Mog, Sampo (Morad Khatchadorian), Cherry (Brandy Litmanen), and their ferocious dog. The nightmarish attack becomes a vicious cycle, one in which Tobias repeatedly tries and fails to act – a heartbreaking representation of his inability to cope with the fallout of his and Elin's loss.

The film, Nyholm says, is based in his own relationships and fears, as well as those of others close to him.

"I know people who have lost a child, and that is also my own worst anxiety, my worst fear. It's so incomprehensibly painful; I can't think of anything worse that could happen to you," he says. "Being a father myself, making the movie was a way to deal with my own fears of loss. In this case, it's about the loss of a child, but it's also about a loss of love, or a loss of your relationship – the loss of what you once had. These are things that can be very painful, physically painful. That's what I wanted to show: it's not an abstract feeling, it's very concrete. It's like a punch in the stomach, or your intestines being drawn out of your body."

Though that particular act of violence doesn't appear in *Koko-di Koko-da*, Nyholm felt that horror was the proper conduit through which to explore those themes.

"I like to play around with genres, and horror is one that gives actual physical sensations to the audience," he explains. "I enjoy movies or music that can actually give me these sorts of sensations, not just intellectual ones. Here, dealing with horror elements, it was not just to make people afraid – that's not what I was after. It was more like I wanted people to feel a kind of a pain when they saw it, and maybe relate it to their own experiences, so by the end, maybe I could give them some confirmation that it's okay to feel like this; it's okay to be in those dark spots in your life, because there is hope that things will be better."

The filmmaker, who previously presented a harsh reality touched by fantasy in 2016's *Jätten* (*The Giant*), adds that Tobias and Elin's tormentors were also inspired by his own experience. He recalls going on a camping trip similar to the couple's, and having an early-morning encounter with a trio of "strange people" who looked exactly as they do in *Koko-di Koko-da*. However, "Even though I would say that everything that happens in the film, I've seen with my own eyes,



Life's A Song: *Koko-di Koko-da* presents a juxtaposition of absurd humour and gut-wrenching terror. From top: an image from one of the film's shadow puppet segments, Peter Belli as the maniacal Mog, and Tobias (Leif Edlund Johansson) doomed to relive his worst nightmare.

I was in a kind of state where I was half-awake, half-asleep. I witnessed these images presented in front of me; maybe they didn't happen for real, but I saw them."

The violence they inflict upon Tobias and Elin is uncompromisingly harsh, though at times it becomes so heightened that it almost approach-

es slapstick, in the vein of Michael Haneke's *Funny Games*. Yet Nyholm didn't intend for anyone viewing it to laugh.

"I think it is more disturbing that way," he says. "They are so irrational, those characters; you don't know what's driving them, where they come from or if they're even real. They seem to



3 In Hell: Mog's band of misfits are stranger than fiction. "They seem to have come from a circus or something like that; you can't quite put your finger on it." — Johannes Nyholm

have come from a circus or something like that; you can't quite put your finger on it. And it's important that you can see that they represent something bigger, even though you don't really know what it is. They are so iconic in their appearances that you feel like there is some deeper, bigger force behind them, something that you can't do anything about; it's just there."

Reinforcing the interpretation of Mog as a kind of deranged entertainer — at least for some European audiences — is the against-type casting of Belli. Considered the first Danish rock star, he's had a number of hit records and opened for The Beatles and The Rolling Stones in his home country (coincidentally, he released a cover of "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" in 1968) over the course of his six-decade career. Nonetheless, he was totally unknown in Sweden, and to Nyholm.

"He just showed up in a Google search, his face, and I thought he looked amazing. He has this extreme charisma and energy. He's been an entertainer all his life, and has this magic air around him, so I realized almost immediately that this was the guy who had to play the villain — if you call him a villain; I refer to him as the old forest gentleman. I knew the character was going to sing this children's song, but it was a coincidence that the guy who played him happened to be a singer. It feels like this role was actually made for him, even though I wrote it before I met him. It was just a perfect match, like all the main actors were."

Elaborating on that observation, Nyholm says that both Johansson and Gallon have had ex-

periences they could relate to their roles, which made the film very personal to them.

"We tried to use that when we were making the film. I wanted their dialogue to be very realistic, so it was important to me to work with the actors so they could draw from their lives. We tried to portray realistic situations, but then also, at the same time, often very dreamlike scenes, using very long takes and long silences."

The result is hypnotic and disorienting, and *Koko-di Koko-da* possesses what the filmmaker calls "the structure of a nightmare," constantly pulling the rug out from under the audience's sense of security.

"It's important to take people to unexpected places, to give them a ride they are not expecting, to tell a story in a way that makes them alert and attentive. Most movies just have the same structure and dramaturgy, and you can see from frame one how they will end. I get quite bored with that, and I believe it's up to filmmakers to offer other ways to tell a story, to come up with something new. It's always exciting when I see storytelling done in a different way."

Nyholm's most unique gambit is to punctuate the grim reality of Tobias and Elin's ordeal with shadow-puppet interludes in which bunnies and birds play out a similar scenario, albeit with an ultimately more hopeful tone.

"Those sequences were not there when I was

first thinking about the film," reveals Nyholm, who previously explored the form in his short film *Dreams from the Woods* (an expansion of a music video for the Swedish electronica group Little Dragon). "I added them because the film was so cruel without them, and I wanted to give the audience a little bit of hope, a little bit of poetry. They work rather like a goodnight story or a lullaby to the audience that suggests to them that everything will be okay, life is beautiful after all, love can help you. In the shadow puppetry, I also wanted to convey, for just a few minutes, the way we told stories thousands of years before cameras were invented. It gives a more timeless tone to the film."

Even with the momentary reassurance that these passages provide, *Koko-di Koko-da* remains an unsparing experience, and Nyholm acknowledges that it may be too much for certain viewers.

"It's a film that pushes people's buttons, in one way or another," he says. "Some people are really, really affected. One woman cried for hours afterward, and then after that, she said it was like a catharsis for her, and that she felt it was about her life; it was so personal for her. Whereas others can't stand it, it's too much; some people leave the cinema, they feel it's too unpleasant, like it's torture. It's quite common that people either love it or they hate it. Either you can relate to it, or you just don't want to have anything to do with it." 🐾



HORROR CULTURE



STEPHEN KING'S *THE SHINING* PUT IT IN THE SPOTLIGHT,
BUT COLORADO'S STANLEY HOTEL HAS ALWAYS HAD ITS
VERY OWN SPOOKY HISTORY

ONCE UPON THE OVERLOOK

BY
IAN NELIGH



THEY SAY THE HOTEL WAS HAUNTED BEFORE THE BOOK. ITS SEQUEL. THE OPERA. THE MOVIE. AND THE TELEVISION MINISERIES. But there's little doubt that Stephen King's 1977 terrifying tour de force, *The Shining*, brought the Stanley Hotel to the forefront of an appreciative horror community.

The 110-year-old hotel in the picturesque mountain town of Estes Park, Colorado, was the inspiration for King's haunted Overlook Hotel. For some, the 142-room hotel is as famous as Long Island's Amityville Horror house, or even Michael Myers' South Pasadena home. As many as 400 people a day sign up for a tour of The Stanley, making the small staging area feel a little like a macabre Disney attraction.

On a warm Saturday afternoon, visitors milled around the hotel's lobby or followed tour guides who spoke gleefully of ghosts and tuberculosis. Groups of children ran around outside, and one girl stared into the opening of the hotel's hedge maze.

"This was where they filmed *The Shining*," her father said over her shoulder.

"No. The hotel was only the inspiration for the book," corrected her mother.

They're both right. Stanley Kubrick filmed his 1980 adaptation on the soundstages at Elstree Studios in Hertfordshire, England, and filmmakers captured the film's brooding exterior shots at the Timberline Lodge in Oregon. King, famously vocal about his dissatisfaction with Kubrick's film, ultimately wrote a three-part miniseries in 1997, directed by frequent King collaborator Mick Garris, which was filmed in the actual Stanley Hotel.

But the roots of *The Shining* go further back to September 30, 1974, when the author originally visited the hotel and was inspired to write what would become a masterpiece of horror fiction. Conversation and movement fill the old building with life today, but when King visited it was empty, silent and terrifying.

A FATEFUL VISIT

King and his wife Tabitha stayed at the hotel just before it closed for the winter season of 1974. They were the only visitors and, as they ate in the empty dining room, a radio played orchestral music which drifted down the empty hallways.

Supposedly, the two were originally trying to reach the mountain town of Grand Lake from Boulder, but found U.S. Highway 34 closed due to a

snowstorm. They turned around and headed back to the town of Estes Park and the only hotel they could find.

Lillian Steele, the manager of the Stanley's busy tour operations, has the story of King's original visit and the location of the building's many ghosts memorized like gospel.

"When Stephen King got here it needed a new roof and the walls [were peeling]," she says. "It just kind of looked like a creepy old hotel."

King was given a private tour by the hotel's owner, which is when he learned about some of the building's supernatural highlights.

"Wandering through its corridors, I thought that it seemed the perfect — maybe the archetypical — setting for a ghost story," King later said.

The hallway on the second floor is quiet for the time being — moments before a tour of about twenty people were corralled through a set of key-card-locked doors to the other side and back again. Paying little attention to the tourists, hotel employee Terina Lee goes from room to room, ensuring each is ready for the evening's guests. She tells me that she firmly believes the hotel is haunted but doesn't especially mind it.

"I start nights next week, I'm pumped," she



says, grinning. "The best thing that's happened so far is somebody said 'good morning' to me when there was nobody there. It was pretty cool."

Lee is responsible for making sure all the rooms are clean, including the notorious Room 217 (Room 237 in Kubrick's film). Of all the rooms in the hotel, this is the one that is considered the most haunted. One story King would have undoubtedly heard during his tour was of the troubled room and its volatile history.

ROOM 217

That story would connect the hotel's most infamous room to a chambermaid, but first, a little bit of history: wealthy businessman Freelan Oscar Stanley started the hotel in 1909 initially as a resort for his wealthy friends and others looking to recover from tuberculosis. Famous performers of the time visited The Stanley, including Harry Houdini who came on two separate occasions. A trap door in the stage was built for him and still exists.

As it happened, the hotel experienced an electrical blackout two years after opening. Each room was equipped with a gas-powered wall lamp for just such an emergency. During the outage, employee Elizabeth Wilson hurried to Room 217 to light it up — what no one knew was that acetylene had been leaking into the room for days from a cracked lamp. As she reached the room, her candle ignited the buildup, causing an explosion.

"Elizabeth Wilson, a chambermaid, was blown from the second floor to the dining room [below]," reported one local newspaper. The explosion was so massive that some residents spotted debris, including a bathtub, more than a half-mile away. Incredibly, Wilson survived the incident, receiving bruises and two broken ankles.

"It was a terrible explosion," agrees Steele. "They think the only reason her spine was intact afterwards was because of the corset [she wore]."

In time, the hotel was rebuilt and recovered, as did Wilson. Undaunted by the explosion, she would



*Great Party, Isn't It? Though famously derided by Stephen King, Stanley Kubrick's film brought *The Overlook* to life.*

return to work at The Stanley, and many years later, would pass away at her home in town but, apparently, death didn't dampen her work ethic. Employees reported seeing her the day after she died and guests unaware of Wilson's passing reported having conversations with her.

King stayed in Room 217 the night of his visit and claimed to have a vivid nightmare that inspired the book.

"That night I dreamed of my three-year-old son running through the corridors, looking back over his shoulder, eyes wide, screaming," the author once described. "He was being chased by a firehose. I woke up with a tremendous jerk, sweating all over, within an inch of falling out of bed. I got up, lit a cigarette, sat in the chair looking out the window at the Rockies, and by the time the cigarette was

done, I had the bones of the book firmly set in my mind."

LEGACY

The Stanley Hotel has embraced its connection to *The Shining* over the years and today is decorated much in the same way as it was for the miniseries. The bar is also made to look like the one in the movie, and a hedge maze was planted in 2015 to complete the homage.

"That hedge maze was put there because people kept coming and asking 'where's your hedge maze? Isn't this *The Shining* hotel?'" Steele explains. "But in the book, they're topiary animals," adding that administration tried to plant animal-shaped hedges but the local elk kept eating them.

"We'd come out and a leg would be missing, an arm, a face — it didn't work out," she says. "But we made this maze out of mountain juniper, so the elk won't eat it."

Further cementing its place as prime horror movie real estate, the hotel became the site of the Stanley Film Festival in 2013, drawing filmmakers from across the globe to the Rockies. In more recent years, the event moved on to other locations but retained its identity as The Overlook Film Festival. Hotel officials aren't ready to say if a film festival will return to The Stanley, but it's clear its ballrooms and hallways are still ripe for a few more scary stories.

And the ghosts? Music, laughing and the clinking of glasses can be heard in one area of the hotel, phantom piano music in another. Steele said she was once shoved aside while walking down a hallway. When she asked the hotel's resident psychic (yes, there's a resident psychic) she was told that the dead are drawn to the hotel.

"She said the employees are still here... have clocked in, and 'maybe you're in the way,'" Steele recounts. But ghosts aren't the only ones interested in returning to the old building. Without a doubt, there's just something about those hallways that keep the living returning time and again as well. 🍷

CINEMACABRE

FILM + DVD + REISSUES



HERE THERE BE GHOSTS

ECHOES OF FEAR

Starring Trista Robinson, Hannah Race and Marshal Hilton
Written and directed by Brian Avenet-Bradley
Artist Rights Distribution

The husband-and-wife team of writer/director Brian Avenet-Bradley and producer/cinematographer Laurence Avenet-Bradley have been turning out accomplished independent horror films (*Ghost of the Needle*, *Dark Remains*, *Malignant*) for a number of years now. Among other things, their output has delivered some of the best – and most honest – jump scares going, and their latest, the multiple-fest-award-winning *Echoes of Fear*, is a consistently absorbing horror/mystery punctuated by genuine jolts.

From its well-handled opening scene onward, *Echoes* spins plenty of chills and atmosphere out of the basic alone-in-a-haunted-house scenario. Trista Robinson (*The Human Race*) stars as Alisa, who takes up residence in her late grandfather's home in the California hills, with plans to flip it with her boyfriend Brandon (Paul Chirico), though he's unable to move in with her. "Are you sure

you'll be okay all alone?" asks her friend Steph (Hannah Race). "I'll be fine. It's just a house," replies Alisa. Muah-ha-ha! Soon, strange noises are coming from the intercom, the attic, etc., a visiting plumber gets scared off, and it becomes evident something is dwelling within the walls as well. In a nice twist on the usual skeptical-pal trope, Steph comes to believe it's a ghost more than Alisa does, and helps her investigate what proves to be a pretty unsettling history.



In the manner of Mike Flanagan and James Wan in *Conjuring* mode, the Avenet-Bradleys have a knack for coaxing horror out of the everyday, and as DP, Laurence makes the most out of the location's many spaces (particularly those under the house). The story takes a number of turns you probably won't see coming that also expand it beyond the haunting trope's usual parameters, with Brian's confident handling of tone complemented by Robinson's consistently sure-footed performance. The result is that the horrors that befall Alisa may well echo with you for a while after the movie ends.

MICHAEL GINGOLD

YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW

GOTHIC HARVEST

Starring Michelle West, Thomas Frances Murphy and Abbie Gayle
Directed by Ashley Hamilton
Written by Chris Kobin
Cinedigm

Actor/songwriter/reality TV star/celebrity sci-on Ashley Hamilton makes his directorial debut with *Gothic Harvest*, a would-be chiller about New Orleans voodoo that unfortunately is somewhat less scary than his father George's *Love at First Bite*.

After an opening seduction-gone-bad scene that doesn't have much to do with anything else in the film, but delivers some screen skin early, we're introduced to four indistinguishable and annoying college girls partying during Mardi Gras. They receive a chicken foot from a strange street mystic before one of them is picked up in a bar by handsome stranger Gar (short for Gargol and played by Hamilton himself). He whisks her off to his family's estate, where the poor girl winds up tied to a bed and



ball-gagged while matriarch Griselda (Lin Shaye) relates the brood's cursed history. Cue flashbacks involving legendary 19th-century voodoo queen Marie Laveau and some anachronistic dialogue. Meanwhile, the other three friends enlist the help of local detective Hollis (Bill Moseley), though he's more interested in macking on one of them with cheesy pickup lines.

His attempts at seduction are among the many scenes in *Gothic Harvest* that do nothing to move the story along, and give the film the impression of a first act padded out to feature length. There's more back story than plot and not much actual horror here, and the introductory moments are tarted up with lots of flash frames, slow motion, artificial print damage and other show-offy, pointless post-production tricks. After the movie comes to its anticlimactic, cynical ending, the closing credits reveal that Shaye and Moseley were associate producers on *Gothic Harvest*, though it's likely their strongest motivation to take part in this weak vehicle was the chance to travel to the Big Easy.

MICHAEL GINGOLD

IMAGINARY END

DANIEL ISN'T REAL

Starring Miles Robbins, Patrick Schwarzenegger and Sasha Lane

Directed by Adam Egypt Mortimer

Written by Adam Egypt Mortimer and Brian DeLeeuw
Samuel Goldwyn Films

Elijah Wood's independent production company SpectreVision (*Mandy*, *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*) continues to make waves with *Daniel Isn't Real*. The thriller (based upon co-

scribe DeLeeuw's 2009 novel *In This Way I Was Saved*) makes the most of its limited budget, giving us trippy effects, monsters, and a touch of the cosmic while addressing mental illness, toxic masculinity, and the ways we deal with trauma.

As his parents argue, young Luke (Griffin Robert Faulkner) leaves their Brooklyn brownstone with his beloved plush friend in hand. He wanders by a grisly crime

scene and, before his young mind can begin to process all the damage of the day, Daniel (Nathan Chandler Reid) appears to distract him. The boys become friends, and when Luke's mother Claire (Mary Stuart Masterson) finally arrives to take him home, she invites his new imaginary friend over for a play date. When their shenanigans escalate from innocent broom duel to near homicide, Claire makes Luke lock Daniel away

in a dollhouse. Ten years later, Luke (Miles Robbins) is struggling with classes, social situations, and his increasingly mentally ill mother: When hallucinations begin, he returns home and unlocks the dollhouse, unleashing the forgotten-but-not-gone Daniel (Patrick Schwarzenegger).

With its hints of *Fight Club*, *Drop Dead Fred*, and even *Freaky Friday*, *Daniel Isn't Real* treads familiar ground but manages to forge its own way with some striking visuals and the questions it raises about our darkest impulses. Robbins is terrific as the kind, insecure Luke, worried for his fragile, mad mother. On the other hand, Schwarzenegger's Daniel has slick-haired douchey smarm to spare, but lacks the gravity and menace needed to truly terrify. He's at his best when he sulks as Luke gives his attention to girls, adding homoerotic complexity to their already strange relationship.

Is Daniel solely the product of Luke's broken mind, or something more? The film's title might say that he isn't real, but that doesn't make Daniel any less dangerous.

STACIE PONDER



Daniel Isn't Real



2019: A MIXED ANTHOLOGY

PORTALS

Starring Deanna Russo, Neil Hopkins and Ptolemy Slocum
Directed by Gregg Hale, Liam O'Donnell, Eduardo Sánchez

Written by Christopher White, Sebastian Bendix, Timo Tjahjanto and Liam O'Donnell
Bloody Disgusting

In the summer of 2020, *Portals* tells us, scientists create the first artificial black hole. Less than three weeks later, mysterious portals – apparently solid, silent black monoliths – begin appearing all over the world and drawing people into them, as panic takes hold among the survivors. Where do the portals come from?

Where do they lead? Are the disappeared safe? Are they alive? Will they ever come back?





OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE JOINS A CULT!

NOT WORTH JOINING



JACKALS

Scream Factory

I totally get the appeal of joining a cult. Where else can you worship a charismatic head of cabbage, dress in flowing robes, wear a cool mask, and drink Kool Aid every day of your life? In *Jackals*, a family that totally doesn't get it desperately tries to rescue their son from a cult by kidnapping him and taking him to their country cabin for a bout of professional deprogramming. What they don't count on is his fellow cult members coming to take him back with extreme force. Though it does boast a respectable cast with Stephen Dorff (*Blade*, *FearDotCom*)

and Deborah Kara Unger (*White Noise*, *Silent Hill*), *Jackals* is far too predictable for anyone but the most impressionable and weak willed.

BODY COUNT: 10

BEST DEATH: Twirling Throat Slit

P.I. & FRIENDS VS NAZI BIKER CULT



PLEASURES OF THE DAMNED

Dire Wit Films

A group of cultists off themselves in an evil ritual only to be resurrected 200 years later by a group of Nazi bikers who've brought a sacrifice for their Dark Lord. It's up to a private investigator, a University professor and a couple of hot chicks to try to stop the bikers, kill the cultists, and prevent everlasting evil from engulfing the world. Now imagine that plot set to a thumping disco score and populated by actors with fake moustaches, dollar store wigs, and horribly dubbed dialogue: so bad, it's amazing! Meant to look like a lost Italian horror film from the '70s, this

schlocky, ultra-low budget movie is stuffed with more cheesy dialogue, cool kills, and bad acting than an exploding microwave pizza pop. Two thumbs off!

BODY COUNT: 21

BEST DEATH: Nazi Biker Dick Bite

THE CULT OF BILL OBERST JR.



THE DOOM'S CHAPEL HORROR

Brain Damage Films

Ten years after being blamed for the tragic death of his older brother on their family farm, Kyle Cole has decided to return to the town that shunned him. He's also decided to bring his girlfriend and a documentary filmmaker to capture the whole thing on camera. Just before he left, however, Kyle had joined a strange backwoods cult to seek revenge on all of the townsfolk who were making his life a living hell – and now that he's returned, the cult wants him back. I wasn't sure I liked this movie until I witnessed the performance by Bill Oberst Jr. (*Circus of the*

Dead, *Werewolf Rising*) as a cult leader who looks like the illicit love-spawn of Lance Henriksen and Bill Moseley. I would join any cult he's leading, my intact balls be damned!

BODY COUNT: 17

BEST DEATH: Redneck Leg Loss

LAST CHANCE LANCE

Portals is an anthology piece, and it might have been to the film's benefit to make this fact a bit clearer; although it does contribute to the overall sense of confusion and panic of the stories, the movie feels unstructured at times. It helps that the standout segment is Eduardo Sanchez and Gregg Hale's "Call Center Parts I and II," set in a 911 call centre where dispatchers are doing their best to field incoming calls from a terrified public – until one of the portals appears in their office. The directors use the claustrophobic confines of the call centre to ramp up the tension in real time to a devastating climax, but there is a familiarity to the segment – particularly in the banality of the mundane workplace – that makes it especially chilling. Almost as gripping is "The Other Side," the story of a man separated from his family by a portal and forced by a mysterious intelligence to make a horrific bargain in order to be with them again.

Portals doesn't always work – the pacing sags in the middle and the credits are bafflingly positioned before the culmination of one of the segments – but it's skillfully directed and genuinely chilling in places. It answers few of the questions it poses, but its depiction of a world filled with fear and uncertainty feels unnervingly current.

CLAIRE HORSNELL

THE DEVIL IS REEL

ANTRUM: THE DEADLIEST FILM EVER MADE

Starring Nicole Tompkins and Rowan Smyth

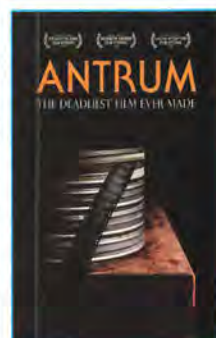
Directed by David Amato and Michael Laicini

Written by David Amato

Uncork'd Entertainment

The mythology built up around *Antrum: The Deadliest Film Ever Made* posits that the titular movie-within-the-movie has been, and can be, responsible for the deaths of those who view it. It's hard to know whether anyone sitting down to watch this mock-doc a full two decades after *The Blair Witch Project* will believe that *Antrum* is truly cursed, but the film and the footage surrounding it do make a pretty persuasive case.

Following a lengthy set-up in which cinema experts, scholars and fest folks relate *Antrum's* history of eliciting madness and fatality everywhere it screens, we're offered the chance to see it for ourselves – if we dare. *Antrum*, which bears a 1979 copyright, a slightly faded look, and a weird, occasionally rough soundtrack, is styled as a European slow burner. In it, teenage Oralee (Nicole Tompkins) and her little brother Nathan (Rowan Smyth) embark on a quest to redeem the soul of their recently deceased dog and end up passing through the antrum: the gateway to Hell where the Devil landed on Earth after being cast out of Heaven. This underworld is a forest haunted by strange beings, including a pair of revolting human demons out to capture, torture, and immolate the kids in





In Fabric

service to Beelzebub.

Amidst its hallucinatory passages, *Antrum* is punctuated with quick flashes of more graphic, gritty imagery and split-second occult sigils, suggesting that someone with a dark purpose has tampered with the print. Or is the film subject to some sort of auto-corruption by a malignance residing within its frames? It's open to interpretation, but Amito and Laicini have fashioned an intriguing study of the manipulation of fear, cinema, and audiences, as the gimmick never breaks its vintage character. Will *Antrum* actually scare you to death? Probably not, but the consistency of its illusion will certainly keep you engrossed.

MICHAEL GINGOLD

GLAMOROUS GIALLO

IN FABRIC

Starring Marianne Jean-Baptiste, Leo Bill and Fatma Mohamed
Written and directed by Peter Strickland
A24 Films

A horror comedy about a killer dress isn't the most promising elevator pitch, but *In Fabric* comes from the delightfully warped mind (and, perhaps, groin) of genre provocateur Peter Strickland (*The Field Guide to Evil*), who manages to wrest intense eeriness (and eerie eroticism) out of an intensely mundane setting: the January sales at a malevolent department store.

Describing *In Fabric*'s plot is an exercise in the absurd, but here goes. *The Cell*'s Marianne

Jean-Baptiste stars as Sheila, a middle-aged divorcee convinced by odd and garrulous sales clerk Miss Luckmoore (Strickland regular Fatma



Mohamed) to buy a new red dress for a date. She does, but it gives Sheila a rash, and any attempt to wash the dress results in her washing machine's demise. It becomes clear that the garment is alive. Increasingly bizarre events related to the dress ensue, and it ends up in the hands of drab washing machine repairman Reg (Leo Bill: *28 Days Later*). Meanwhile, something supremely sin-

ister related to the dress continues at the department store.

Strickland's previous genre film, 2014's *Berberian Sound Studio*, wasn't quite a horror movie, despite being set in the world of *giallo* filmmaking. Likewise, *In Fabric* upends genre conventions with transgressive erotic imagery and awkward laughs, provided primarily by *A Dark Song*'s Steve Oram and *The Mighty Boosh*'s Julian Barratt as Sheila's gay bosses. Yet it still creates an atmosphere of dread, despite its outrageous premise.

With *In Fabric*, Strickland has crafted an intensely weird world where dresses kill and we are reminded that mannequins are by their very nature creepy. (They don't move here, à la *The Twilight Zone*'s "The After Hours," but they do bleed from unexpected places.) *In Fabric* will weird you out and (sorry!) leave you in stitches.

SEAN PLUMMER

SESSION 4.9

FRACTURED

Starring Sam Worthington, Lily Rabe and Stephen Tobolowsky
Directed by Brad Anderson
Written by Alan B. McElroy
Netflix

Director Brad Anderson can't seem to keep us out of creepy hospitals. Granted, the hospital in *Fractured* is far less decrepit than the one he used in his excellent 2001 debut *Session 9*, but the result is also significantly less harrowing.

Fractured introduces us to Ray and Joanne Monroe (Sam Worthington and Lily Rabe, respectively), a bickering married couple on a long drive home after a tense Thanksgiving dinner. Their adorable daughter Peri (Lucy Capri) is happily oblivious to the dysfunction, but does need to pee. A quick pit stop for a potty break would

have been barely a footnote on their journey, but a freak accident sends them rushing, panicked, to the nearest small town emergency room. The hospital appears as any other rural medical centre, but when the staff deny that his wife and daughter were ever admitted, Ray realizes that there might be something more nefarious afoot than poor healthcare. His fight to

prove the admittance (and indeed, existence) of Joanne and Peri becomes a dance of gaslighting doctors and red herrings as he desperately tries





In the Tall Grass

to find his beloved family in the strange hospital. Hints of conspiracy and a black market organ trade tease a greater collusion that goes all the way to the top.

Though there is plenty of fertile ground for terror and treachery within the premise, *Fractured* never quite realizes its full potential, mainly due to its tone; the film's cartoonish score and sinister elements make it a campy viewing experience closer to an episode of *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* than the dread and confusion of *The Vanishing*. *Fractured* keeps promising something that it is just not able to deliver.

DEIRDRE CRIMMINS

WANDERED IN AND GOT LOST

IN THE TALL GRASS

Starring Laysla De Oliveira, Avery Whitted and Patrick Wilson
Written and directed by Vincenzo Natali
Netflix

When we first caught wind that Vincenzo (*Cube*, *Splice*) Natali was tackling *In the Tall Grass*, based on the short story co-written by Stephen King and his son, Joe Hill, we were all ears (see *RM#188*). Out now on Netflix, the film rings of the talent involved but ultimately leaves its audience out in left field.

Siblings Cal (Avery Whitted) and Becky (Lays-

la De Oliveira) are on a long drive from their hometown to San Diego, where they hope to meet the couple who will adopt Becky's baby, due to arrive in three months' time. On a brief barf stop (pregnancy, natch), the pair hear a boy's voice calling for help from a nearby field. Upon entering, time and space stop making sense and the pair find themselves hopelessly lost in the tall grass, along with the boy they heard (Will Buie Jr.) and his parents, Ross and Natalie (Patrick and Rachel Wilson: no relation). Becky's baby daddy

Travis (Harrison Gilbertson) enters the mix a few months later (but also concurrently) and the tall grass harbours a mysterious rock that imparts supernatural knowledge and grass-faced tiki men who worship it. Also, autocannibalism. Confused yet?

Now I'm not as well versed on Hill's output but I've read more than my share of King, and his short stories contain his zaniest, most imaginative work. Plot cohesion and a fulfilling conclusion are less important than a captivating set-up in this format, making the transition from script to screen an especially tricky one. If anyone's up to the challenge, it's Natali, who has delivered the gory

goods in many a high-concept project. Still, although he shines in establishing effective claustrophobia and a hellpit/chasm sequence that Clive Barker would applaud, *In the Tall Grass* conjures as much confusion as it does intrigue, with an ending that doesn't deliver satisfaction in either department. Prepare to get lost.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

IN THE RING WITH GOD

THE DIVINE FURY

Starring Seo-joon Park, Sung-ki Ahn, and Woo-shik Choi
Written and directed by Joo-hwan Kim
Well Go USA Entertainment

On paper, Korean action/horror hybrid *The Divine Fury* sounds completely bonkers, like something pulled from the Cannon canon: armed with a holy fire-spitting stigmata, a disillusioned MMA fighter teams up with a priest to battle the forces of Hell and exorcise demons. Unfortunately, writer/director Joo-hwan Kim doesn't tap into his own story's wild potential, aiming instead for seemingly loftier heights.

Yong-hu (Seo-joon Park) is a world champion fighter with wealth and fame, but is consumed with anger over the childhood loss of his father, a police officer who died on duty. That anger lets the Devil slip into Yong-hu's psy-



A STOCKING-LOAD OF YULETIDE TERRORS
AWAIT BEHIND EACH DOOR OF THE ADVENT
CALENDAR IN DEATHCEMBER

24 Days of Horror

BY
MATTHEW C. DUPÉE

HORROR AND THE HOLIDAYS MIGHT GO TOGETHER LIKE THE PEARL WHITE AND BLOOD RED OF A CANDY CANE, but *Deathcember* is the world's first ever Advent-themed horror anthology. Conceived by German filmmaker Dominic Saxl, the upcoming film from Epic Pictures features a whopping 24 short segments by 24 international directors that genre fans are sure to recognize, including Ruggero Deodato (*Cannibal Holocaust*), Lucky McKee (*The Woman*), McKee, Sam (*The Quiet Room*) Wineman, and Pollyanna McIntosh (*Darlin'*).

"The *ABCs of Death* franchise left a tremendous impression on me, because it showcases what an interesting, diverse and exciting movie you can produce with a very small budget," Saxl tells *Rue Morgue*. "But to make an anthology of this sort work, you need a strong frame story, a theme that connects the vast number of segments. The Advent calendar seemed like the perfect 'backbone' for an anthology especially because—at least in Germany—Advent calendars are more than just common; they are a basic ingredient of the Christmas season."

Well aware of the redundant tropes of horror movies of Christmases past, Saxl partnered with friends Ivo Scheloske and Frank Vogt to ensure that *Deathcember* brought uniqueness and diversity to the sub-genre.

"What we were looking for, in the broadest sense, were original ideas," says Saxl, "stories that had never been told before, or stylistic decisions that seemed unique. We wanted to have as much variety in our anthology as possible. Although we're fans of it, we tried to steer away from the Christmas slasher routine—a Santa figure with an axe in his hand marching through the snow—that's been played out a tad too

often. Instead, we have strong female figures; we have dark and disturbing films about real-world problems; critiques on consumerism; and films that display rather sick and macabre humour."

In fact, the scope of *Deathcember* goes beyond Christmas horror stories. Jason Rostovsky's Hanukkah-themed segment "Before Sundown," for instance, leverages lesser-known Jewish traditions and folklore. McKee offers a slickly photographed Old West monster tale called "They Once Had

Horses," pitting a pair of wounded cowboys against an unseen behemoth, while legendary Italian director Deodato contributes an ironic tragedy in his "Casetta Sperduta in Campagna." Perhaps the most jaw-dropping of the bunch is Juergen Kling's wicked animated segment "Crappy Christmas: Operation Christmas Child," which tackles the sexual scandals of the Catholic Church and the horrors of child abuse within a few brief minutes. To bring it all to life, *Deathcember* draws from an all-star cast of genre favourites, including Barbara Crampton (*Re-Animator*), Tiffany Shepis (*Tromeo and Juliet*) and AJ Bowen (*You're Next*).

Saxl hopes *Deathcember* will endure as a great reminder that holiday horror is alive and well, and says he has new stories lying in wait behind unopened Advent calendar doors.

"What we hoped to accomplish is to show audiences that Christmas horror is not some outdated concept that should have been buried in the 1980s," he says, "but instead is something that can have a lot of relevant things to say about the state of affairs today. You can't really make up your fantasy Christian holiday world. Reality is here to stay, and it remains as ugly after the holidays as it was before."





VFW

VETS VS PUNKS

VFW

Starring Stephen Lang, Martin Kove and William Sadler

Directed by Joe Begos

Written by Max Brallier and Matthew McArdle

RLJE Films

che, urging him to take revenge on God and his followers. Troubled by the voices in his head and a wound on his hand that won't stop bleeding, Yong-hu seeks the help of kindly Father Ahn (Sung-ki Ahn). The two pursue The Dark Bishop, who possesses folks around town and offers their souls to The Sacred Serpent. When one possessed girl tells Yong-hu that her demon also possessed the guy who killed his father, the fight becomes personal.

It sounds bonkers, but *The Divine Fury* never loosens up enough to indulge in its craziness. The exorcism scenes add some oomph, but they're too few and far between to balance all of the turgid melodrama. Kim wants to ask big questions about God's apathy in the face of humanity's suffering, but it never goes deeper than "God can't be understood" and other simplistic ruminations on faith. Our hero glowers through neon-lit interiors and unpopulated dark streets, unimpressed by the power he wields and the fact that his fist often burns with holy fire. Ultimately, *The Divine Fury* is too dour for its own good, vastly overlong at 129 minutes, and tonally at odds with its premise the entire time. It's got more than enough of the divine but, regrettably, it lacks fury.

STACIE PONDER

Director Joe Begos has successfully carved himself a cozy midnight movie corner in our beloved genre that's steeped in nostalgia-soaked throwbacks, with the *giallo* lighting and pumping synth scores of yesteryear. Films like *The Mind's Eye* (2015), *Almost Human* (2013) and *Bliss* (2019) are love letters to the VHS era and all the nostalgic baggage that comes with it. In his latest infection outbreak/siege film, *VFW*, Begos keeps the score and the lighting design, but a surprisingly heartfelt cast of characters steal the show.

In the film, a new street drug, Hyplophedrine, is turning area junkies into veiny-faced "Hypers" who will do anything they can to ensure their next fix. One addict's sister (Sierra McCormick) takes matters into her own hands and steals the

entire stash of the biggest dealer in town (Travis Hammer). She flees to the closest building, a sleepy VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) bar, where she joins forces with a group of old army buddies to escape the violently fixated Hypers who want a score and the dealer's cronies out to get their boss' investment back. It's war vets versus drug-addled punk mutants, and there's grimy '80s violence to be had.

By far, the best bits of *VFW* are these quieter moments at the bar between the old friends; Stephen Lang, Martin Kove, George Wendt, Fred "The Hammer" Williamson, and William Sadler



all feel natural as they talk shit about fights they fought and women they frolicked with, as well as darker subject matter – their chemistry and comfort in these moments make it easy to care about the men. Once the violence breaks out, however, the lack of character development outside of their clan and some stylistically mismatched elements make *VFW* pretty uneven to say the least.

Still, it's Begos' most crowd-pleasing film to date, and a good omen for things yet to come.

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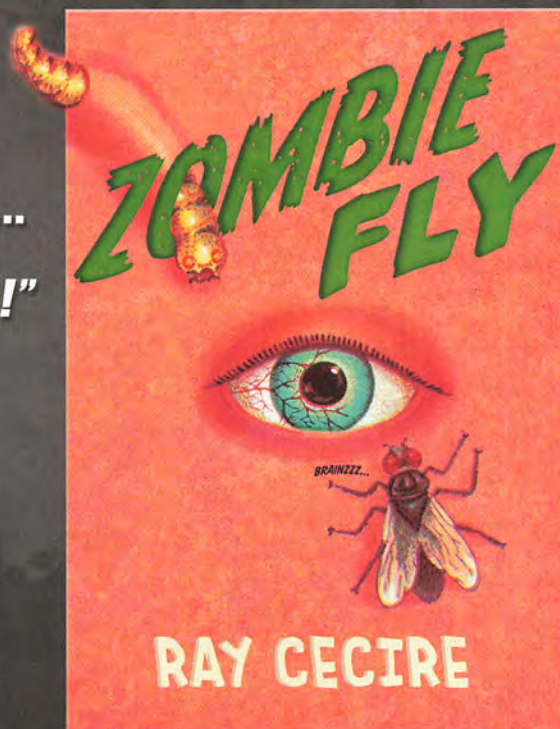
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REISSUES



DOUBLE TROUBLE

THE DARK HALF (1993) Blu-ray

Starring Timothy Hutton, Amy Madigan and Michael Rooker
Written and directed by George A. Romero
Eureka Entertainment

Breaking up, as the saying goes, is hard to do – even more so when you're trying to split from your pulp paperback pseudonym and he takes on an unholy life of his own. That's what befalls mild-mannered Thad Beaumont (Oscar-winner Timothy Hutton) as he attempts to put his penny dreadfuls behind him and embark upon a proper literary career. His nefarious alter ego George Stark (still Hutton, this time sporting cowboy boots, a gleaming straight razor and roughly a litre of pomade) has taken corporeal form and is carving a bloody swath through Thad's friends and acquaintances.

Adapted from Stephen King's 1989 novel (King, of course, lost his own Richard Bachman alter ego to cancer of the pseudonym in 1985), the film sees George Romero hew fairly

faithfully to the source material, from the early eyeball-in-the-brain surgery sequence on. His reluctance to tamper with the property means a lot is crammed in, and the slow, muted pacing could have spelled disaster when combined with on-set bickering, a financially unstable production company and several thousand recalcitrant finches.

Nevertheless, *The Dark Half* wins out by dint of a talented cast (bolstered by *Uncle Buck*'s Amy Madigan and the ever-reliable Michael Rooker, who was Romero's first choice for the lead), some effective jolts, inspired but low-budget FX, and grisly use of the film's recurrent sparrow motif.

Extras include a commentary from Romero, a neat making-of, storyboard art, and various other bits and bobs previously seen on the 2014 Scream Factory reissue. This new edition, however, is even more expansive, offering a 35-page booklet with essays from Simon Ward and a 38-minute



episode of the UK's *Son of the Incredibly Strange Film Show*, which focuses on Romero and Tom Savini. Quite a lot of bang for your buck wouldn't you say, old hoss?

ALEX DELLER

HIGH SCHOOL IS HELL

FEAR NO EVIL (1981) Blu-ray

Starring Stefan Arnglim, Elizabeth Hoffman and Kathleen Rowe McAllen
Written and directed by Frank LaLoggia
Shout! Factory

In the midst of the slasher boom of the late 1970s/early 1980s, an ambitious 24-year-old filmmaker named Frank LaLoggia bucked the trend and made a teen horror flick equally influenced by *The Omen* and *Carrie*. The stew of ideas and inspirations is rather lumpy, yet has its eccentric charms for fans of the era.

Andrew (Stefan Arnglim) is a teenage problem child who's harassed by high-school bullies, but little do his parents or classmates know he's actually an incarnation of the Antichrist! While two archangels in human form (Elizabeth Hoffman and Kathleen Rowe McAllen) set out to stop him, Andrew begins to realize his powers and destiny to unleash an apocalypse on Earth. There's oodles of religious exposition, lush Gothic photography (nicely captured in the Blu-Ray's 1.85:1 transfer), creative killings (including one by

dodgeball), zombies rising from their graves, and a pronounced streak of pre-*Nightmare on Elm Street 2* homoeroticism. It doesn't all hold together and the non-horrific portions can be slow going, though LaLoggia (who later made the far more composed ghost story *Lady in White*) clearly gave the project his all. *Fear No Evil* stands today as a flashback to a low-budget genre filmmaking era when anything went, and a hot rock/

punk soundtrack (Ramones, B-52's, Sex Pistols, etc.) could be had for, er, a song.

Arnglim recalls his days on the movie in a spirited, often amusing audio commentary moderated by Justin Beahm, who also contributes a pair of interview segments. In one, Arnglim gives a 37-minute oral history of his career – from being a child actor in the '60s, most notably on the Irwin Allen show *Land of the Giants* (plus a fun story about *Gunsmoke*) through to *Fear* – that has crossover with the commentary but also some fresh anecdotes. The other sees effects artist John Eggett offer a similar overview of his own eclectic career and *Fear* highlights. The LaLoggia/DP Fred Goodich commentary from the Anchor Bay DVD hasn't been ported over, though, so hold on to that one.

MICHAEL GINGOLD



SCREECHER FEATURE

KILLER CROCODILE (1989) Blu-ray

Starring Anthony Crenna, Ann Douglas and Thomas Moore
Directed by Larry Ludman (Fabrizio De Angelis)
Written by David Parker Jr. (Dardano Sacchetti)
and Larry Ludman
Severin Films

There's a wonderfully dumb sequence in the first half of *Killer Crocodile* where the giant reptile collapses part of a dock, a little girl hangs onto the edge for dear life, and one adult after another jumps into the water to help her instead of simply pulling her up from above. If you can appreciate the camp value of scenes like that (and grew up as a reptile-crazy kid like me), you'll find some enjoyment in Severin Films' lovingly remastered Italian *Jaws* rip-off.

Producer Fabrizio De Angelis, who backed a number of Lucio Fulci classics, directed and co-wrote this saga of environmentalists investigating toxic waste dumping in Santo Domingo who lose one of their friends to the big croc. While more supporting characters are munched to the strains of Riz Ortolani's ersatz-John Williams score, irascible local hunter Joe (Thomas Moore filling the Robert Shaw role) is drawn into the attempts to kill

the critter. As the opening credits inform, "The crocodile was created and built by Giannetto De Rossi" (he and Ortolani are the only members of the production team to avoid Anglicization there), and it's a little more effective than the faux aquatic beasts seen in *Great White* et al. — though the same can't be said for the typically awkward post-dubbed dialogue.

On the Blu-ray, interviews by the Freak-O-Rama team with De Rossi, cinematographer Federico Del Zoppo and actors Anthony Crenna (yes, Richard's son) and Pietro Genuardi shed entertaining light on the film's production, creators and cast. A limited edition (4000 units) comes with a Blu-ray of *Killer Crocodile 2* (1990), helmed by De Rossi himself, executive-produced by "Roger Hack" (!), and just as cheesy, if not



Killer Crocodile

quite as directly *Jaws*-indebted, as its predecessor. This disc contains the real treat of the whole set: *The Prince of Plasma*, a feature-length documentary by Naomi Holwill on De Rossi's lengthy career, featuring interviews with many of his collaborators and admirers, that's a must-watch for Italo-horror buffs.

MICHAEL GINGOLD

BAD TRIP

NIGHTWISH (1989) Blu-ray

Starring Brian Thompson, Clayton Rohner and Elizabeth Kaitan
Written and directed by Bruce R. Cook
MVD Visual/Unearthed Films

A holdover from the late '80s era of video store fodder, *Nightwish* sees a group of parapsychology students taking a road trip to a derelict desert house to document evidence of the paranormal. Naturally, things don't go as planned in Bruce Cook's riff on *Altered States*, *Poltergeist*, and several other genre tropes (Aliens! Seances! Mad Scientists!). The film's strangely meandering tone never coalesces into a solid story, but the interest level is kept up through sheer weirdness and oozing practical effects from Greg Nicotero and company, especially as the plot derails toward an ending pilfered from *The Wizard of Oz*.



The film isn't as psychedelically trippy as it's likely aiming to be; the disorienting dream vs. reality doesn't come off here as well as it does in, say, *Videodrome*. But it's well-photographed by Bruce Cook and Director of Photography Sean McLin, who pull out the expected stops: canted angles, a green/red *giallo* colour scheme, and both wide angle and split diopter lenses (as well as making use of star Elizabeth Kaitan in a wet T-shirt, something the Blu-ray exploits fully in the accompanying 24-page booklet). There are some entertainingly weird dream sequences (such as when Alisha Das is aroused by an alien fog), while the best bit of casting comes from the extended cameo from Brian Thompson as muscle-bound lughead Dean. Ultimately, *Nightwish* is best experienced

as a collection of intriguing parts rather than a satisfying whole, and that's probably being too kind.

Still, kudos to MVD Visual and Unearthed Films, who have gone the extra mile to restore a film that most people only experienced in 525-line 480p (or as an eye-catching VHS box), with a Blu-ray nicely mastered from a 4K transfer (!), though extra features here only amount to trailers and the commentary track with exec producer Paul White.

JEFF SZPIRGAS

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CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

Bowen Fesses Up

by John W. Bowen

What to watch tonight, Wretched Reader? A crime caper about a good-hearted hit man who just wants to provide for his family but must satisfy a randy policewoman to avoid arrest? A splatter-intensive action thriller/satire/softcore skin flick in which a lucha libre-masked, kung-fu fighting private eye – who can locate missing women by sniffing their panties – must save his virginal sister from the clutches of a German crime boss with a god complex? A silent – well, not actually silent so much as just dialogue-free and deeply surreal – rape/revenge maim-fest about a woman who returns from the dead as a retribution-bent killer mermaid? A darker, funnier riff on *Falling Down* in which a browbeaten milquetoast recovering from a recent heart attack discovers that the one sure-fire way to reduce his blood pressure is to murder the people who stress him out? *Sensitive New Age Killer* (2000), *Masked Avenger Versus Ultra-Villain in the Lair of the Naked Bikini* (a.k.a. *The Masturbating Gunman*, 2000), *Defenceless* (2004) and *Stressed to Kill* (2016), respectively, make up less than half of expat Australian auteur Mark Savage's filmography, but you could binge his entire back catalogue over a Canadian winter weekend and never feel like you saw the same film twice.

Savage's barking mad sensibility mines the farthest reaches of American, European and Asian exploitation cinema, cross-bred in unexpected ways. His latest, *Purgatory Road* – co-written with Tom Parnell and hailed by Ray (Live Girls) Garton as "Flannery O'Connor on meth" – hit home video last winter on the Unearthed imprint, and it heads south in every sense. Brothers Vincent (Gary Cairns) and Michael (Luke Albright) roam the back roads of the American Deep South in a decrepit camper they've turned into a confession booth on wheels. Vincent passes himself off as a priest, though his



credentials are sketchy; his devoted, long-suffering brother is the combination roadie and cleanup crew. Because it's confession with a catch: you can unburden yourself of a staggering array of sins to Father Vincent – from lying and adultery to pedophilia and murder – and be guaranteed absolution in exchange for the usual empty gestures of penance. But whatever you do, never – ever – let on that you've stolen. Rob a bank or shoplift a can of tuna, dine-and-dash or embezzle millions, it matters not to Father Vincent; run afoul of the Eighth Commandment and he'll chop you into chunky soup and dispose of your remains via... well, let's steer clear of Spoilerville but suffice to say it doesn't involve any semblance of a proper Christian burial. (Vincent's crusade is mostly explained in an opening flashback, but many particulars aren't revealed until well into the third reel.) Complication – as if Vincent and Michael need it – soon arrives in the lithe form of Mary Francis (Trista Robinson, probably the most inspired casting choice of Savage's career), who drifts into their rural orbit, an itin-

erant psychopath with a growing body-count of her own. When Vincent falls for her like a ton of kudzu, everything that can go wrong goes cattywampus;

meanwhile, longsuffering Michael, who's fallen for a nice girl (Sylvia Grace Crim), is about set to cut and run.

I've ranted in these pages about Savage's highly original oeuvre more than once and while I admittedly enjoy some of his films more than others, my admiration for his body of work comes down to two constants: his steadfast refusal to compromise his eccentric vision even if it condemns him to tiny budgets and dodgy distribution, and his knack for unabashedly channelling a staggering array of influences onscreen without ever going all Quentin Zombie on us. Then again, his photography skills bear mention as well; even his early features, shot on dodgy-ass VHS tape back in the '90s, look incredibly crisp and vibrant. ("Even though I make low-budget films, I can't accept them looking shoddy," he recently told me. "I push for a rich look and hope I achieve it.") *Purgatory Road's* release also involves Savage breaking into a new medium; his own novelization of the film is slated for release in December.

"The material is very *me*," he explains, "so I had much more background and several detours that didn't make the final movie. I'm also wrapping up another novel for release next year, so I figured this'd be a reasonable move. Gotta keep pushing."

The moral? Thou shalt not steal, but don't despair. There are still nine Commandments left, so get the hell out of my basement and break them wisely. (I call dibs on adultery.)





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FILES FROM THE BLACK MUSEUM

THE LONG SHADOWS OF CLASSIC HORROR'S PAST

BY PAUL CORUPE

Sucking It Up

"THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO SPEND A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF TIME AND ENERGY TRYING TO ALTER THE PAST MAY DISCOVER, LIKE THE LEECH WOMAN HERSELF, THAT THEY'VE LOST FAR MORE THAN THEY'VE GAINED."

Regrets? We've all had a few. But when things don't turn out the way we hoped – and in life, that's more often than not – the best that most of us can hope for is to make peace with our past mistakes and move on. It's usually only on the big screen that second chances are possible, as flawed characters discover they can revisit their formative years and correct unfortunate choices in ways that can have life-altering consequences. The fleeting hope that our life history isn't always a closed book is a Hollywood daydream that ultimately turns into a nightmare in *The Leech Woman* (1960), a Universal Pictures programmer that recently made its Blu-ray debut from Shout! Factory. This realistic look at remorse is a sobering reminder that it's more important to consider the potential of the future than dwell on the missteps of the past – especially when life's disappointments are beyond our control.

There are no leeches in the film, but there is a woman – Coleen Gray plays June Talbot, the bitterly unhappy wife of scientist Dr. Paul Talbot (Phillip Terry). In between rounds of bickering with her disinterested husband, June has started to hit the booze hard. She's taken to drunkenly confiding in her handsome young attorney Neil (Grant Williams), which he sympathetically tolerates. It's not much of a life, but then everything changes when June accompanies her husband on a trip to Africa, where she witnesses a tribal rite that reverses the aging process via the ingestion of a mixture of mysterious powder and the pituitary gland fluid of a freshly killed victim. When June is offered the chance to try the treatment herself, she picks her husband as the sacrifice that will make her young again. Returning home, the rejuvenated June romances a now-smitten Neil, but discovers that the mixture's effects are only temporary – to obtain more gland fluid and maintain her youthful façade, she starts killing others, eventually rousing the suspicions of the police.

As an exploration of regret, *The Leech Woman* has June trying to tragically rewrite her own less-than-ideal history, only to realize that she should have let the ghosts of her past remain buried. Considered today, the film



still serves as a reminder that we shouldn't obsess over past disappointments, but instead use their lessons to help shape a better future. Recently, for example, we've seen a glut of viral fan campaigns to demand immediate remakes of unsatisfying films and TV series. Dissatisfaction over the final episodes of HBO's *Game of Thrones* this past spring and the opportunity to provide instant online feedback saw more than 1.5 million viewers signing a petition to have new writers redo the entire final season. And this isn't the first incident – last year, a fundraiser tried

to raise millions to "correct course" with an insta-remake of *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2018), while stubborn *Justice League* (2017) loyalists have been agitating for the release of a director's cut for more than two years.

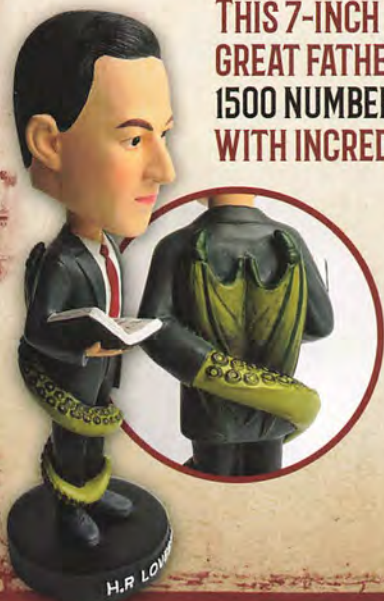
Viewers are certainly within their rights to be disappointed by the way certain stories wrap up, especially due to the increasingly imposing time and emotional commitments required these days. But it's important to remember that even if Hollywood executives did take these campaigns seriously, a redo or re-edit is prone to just as many problems as it seems to solve – any remake-weary horror fan can tell you that. June learns something similar as the life-changing promise of her pituitary-juice power shake wears off, leaving her with only wrinkles on her face and blood on her hands. Unlike the supernatural second takes offered to George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), or more recently, Tree in *Happy Death Day* (2017), *The Leech Woman* is far more cynical in its approach, as June's long-desired second chance turns out just as messy and uncontrollable as her first – in the end, it really wasn't much of a chance at all.

June's desire for a "do-over" may be more significant than formally protesting a TV show's creative decisions, but in both cases it's probably best to close old wounds and let them heal rather than keep picking away at the scab. Those who choose to spend a significant amount of time and energy trying to alter the past may discover, like the leech woman herself, that they've lost far more than they've gained. 🧟

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BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

In 2013, Thom Burgess wrote *Malevolents* 'Click Click', an eerie little ghost story set in London's most infamous haunted house that features a terrifying spectre that clicks his tongue non-stop. The claustrophobic and intimate tale has now led to the creation of *Ghoster*, a sprawling, centuries-spanning epic chronicling the adventures of a secret guild of ghost hunters.

"When I wrote *Malevolents* 'Click Click' the plan was to explore deeper into the world in which these horrors could exist, and what safeguards would be needed in order protect humanity from deadly Malevolents," says Burgess. "This was the initial seed for *Ghoster*."

Thinking beyond the comic page, Burgess contacted filmmaker Toby Meakins, whose supernatural shorts were a favourite of the writer's. Burgess told Meakins the basic premise of *Ghoster*, and together they crafted an entire world and lore around these Malevolent-hunters: the 'Guild of Ghosters.' Founded in the days of Elizabeth I, the Guild is made up of five family factions who over the centuries have spread across various continents, fighting Malevolents – and occasionally each other.

But every epic story must have a beginning, and the first chapter of *Ghoster* to be released takes place not in the 16th century, but the 21st. Two young boys, each a member of a Guild family, are preparing to undergo the Gallowing: the sacred initiation of the Guild, in which prospective members must enter the Tenebrate, the netherworld home of the Malevolents. Armed with special weapons, the Ghoster-in-training must seize a Malevolent and dispatch it to Hell – or die trying.

Though stylistically and thematically different from Burgess' previous work, the project continues the writer's fascination with ghost stories.

"*Ghoster* takes that traditional medium and expands it out to a whole new level," he says. "In our story, the world is being torn apart by



Ghoster: An ancient guild trains initiates to dispatch Malevolents in Thom Burgess' new series.

Malevolent attacks and the only barrier between these horrors and humanity is an archaic, nearly extinct Guild who have to risk a fate worse than death by turning themselves temporarily into ghosts in order to dispatch Malevolents."

Burgess has a knack for devising truly ghoulish creations as seen in 'Click Click' as well as its follow-up, *The Eyrie* [RM#178]. Though *Ghoster*'s canvas may be broader, he is determined to strike the same spine-chilling notes.

"We spent a huge amount of time pouring over each of our Malevolents," Burgess admits. "These ghosts aren't your classic 'woman in white' style of apparitions; these are nasty, hungry entities who'll rip you apart for

the hell of it and make you suffer eternity with them. It was important for us that the Malevolents still retained a particularly eerie look and behaved as horrifically as possible whilst having

a traceable aesthetic where you could easily see the remnants of the people or creatures they once were."

Burgess and Meakins, along with artist Joe Becci, have great plans for the future of *Ghoster*, and with a tale spanning at least five centuries there are plenty of Malevolents to keep the Guild and readers busy.

"What we really still find exciting is that it's a such a rich history that dates back for centuries," says Burgess. "We can easily dip in and out of historical periods and explore how Ghosters spread to different cultures around the world – it's a truly global concept. Of course, there is also a really cool existential threat, yet to be revealed, that needs to be overcome. But you'll have to follow Ghosterworld online to find out more about that!"

For more information on *Ghoster*, visit theghosterproject.com

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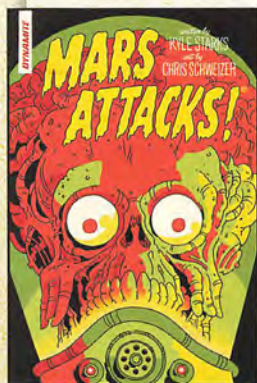


QUICK CUTS

In 1991, Marv Wolfman and Gene Colan reunited for a follow-up to their groundbreaking 1970s *Tomb of Dracula* series. The result, a four-issue miniseries called *The Tomb of Dracula: Day of Blood! Night of Redemption!* has now been collected in one volume for the first time. Though the tale includes characters from the original series – including Dracula's descendant Frank Drake, Blade the vampire hunter, and, of course, the King of the Vampires himself – Wolfman and Colan don't just rehash past glories. Both Drake and Blade are broken men, the result of years fighting Dracula and then dealing with the aftermath of his (supposed) death, making them more tragic figures than traditional heroes. Meanwhile, Dracula is resurrected into the brave new world of 1991, and must contend with alien concepts such as computers and CD-ROMs. While certainly tongue-in-cheek, Colan demonstrates that even later in his career, he remains one of comics' masters of horror.



There are two things I expect from a *Mars Attacks!* comic: gore and a sick sense of humour. Luckily, Dynamite's first series since acquiring the license ticks my boxes. Sure, we've



seen it before: Martians invade Earth, sadistically killing humans and livestock with assorted death rays, robots and giant insects. But Kyle Starks and Chris Schweizer make it seem fresh thanks to a pair of fun leads (Spencer, the middle-aged life drop-out, and his octogenarian pappy) and a healthy dose

of sick laughs. A take-no-prisoners Martian assault/human barbecue at an old folks home early on prove the creators are in on the joke and are ready to strip the flesh and get right down to the franchise's bones.

The shapeliest vampire meets the shaper of corpses in the latest Dynamite crossover *Vampirella vs. Reanimator*. Not content to let lead men lay, Herbert West continues to tinker with his reagent elixir, leading him to resurrect an ancient Aztec goddess of death – who just so happens to be an ex-resident of the planet Drakulon, and sworn enemy of Vampirella. The vampire foes inevitably clash, with Herbert caught in the middle of the monster storm.



Despite a strong set-up, the book fails to adequately capture the appeal of either property, with West in particular coming across as a rather bland and generic mad scientist. The decision to present the story in black and white with intermittent splashes of colour is also only marginally successful. Though certainly distinctive, and a creative way to combine *Vampirella*'s grayscale origins with *Reanimator*'s Day-Glo palette, the result fails to truly engage the reader.

Eric Powell's *Spook House* anthology is unashamedly meant for children. Here you'll find stories filled with gross-outs, ghosts and ghoulies, and plenty of pun-tacular jokes that offer a creepy yet relatively safe experience for kids. That's not to say there isn't plenty to satisfy older readers, however, with most stories throwing in lots of wretched references that only adults will appreciate. After all, it's doubtful the prepubescent set will get jokes about daddy's commemorative Steve Guttenberg film plates, or why the little girl in *The Exorcist* homage "Our Big Sister is the Devil" is named

Peg Sue-Sue. And how many ten-year-olds can genuinely admire "The Crud Kid," a loving dedication to Wein and Wrightson's *Swamp Thing*? These scary stories may be fit for kids but the care and attention shown by the creators mean they deserve to be read by adults as well.

Snow White has been re-imagined several times over the years and while some versions have recast the wicked Queen as the heroine, *Snow, Glass, Apples* may be the first time *Snow White* has been portrayed as a vampire. To be fair, it's debatable exactly what creature the little princess is, but suffice it to say she's

one nasty piece of work, devouring anyone that gets in her way, including her doting father. Under the circumstances, it's perfectly reasonable that the not-so-wicked Queen would want to do away with her step-daughter. Neil Gaiman follows some of the fairy tale's familiar beats but there's enough of a reworking to classify this as his own unique vision, and one brought to life spectacularly by Colleen Doran's sumptuous artwork, to boot. Equally beautiful and ghastly when it needs to be, the illustrations may well be the long-time artist's most accomplished work to date.



THE FRIGHTFEST GUIDE TO
WEREWOLF MOVIESGavin Baddeley
FAB Press

Horror movie guides – the kind that compile a few hundred reviews under some kind of specific rubric, like a particular monster or a given nation's cinematic output – are a staple of certain publishers. And they can be fun, depending on

the talent and enthusiasm of the writer and art director. (Woe betide those with no budget for colour photography.)

Fortunately, quality cult publisher FAB Press engaged occult expert/werewolf obsessive Gavin Baddeley (*Lucifer Rising*, *Dissecting Marilyn Manson*) to write *The*

Frightfest Guide to Werewolf Movies, the fourth guidebook published under the auspices of the respected British horror movie festival. An introduction penned by *Dog Soldiers* director Neil Marshall prefaces the book with a thoroughly researched and intriguing history of lycanthropy in history, myth and literature. (Who knew so many serial killers were dubbed “The Werewolf of” their particular region?)

Then comes the meat: arranged chronologically, the guide begins with 1922's *Nosferatu* (with a hyena mistaken for a werewolf) and closes with 2019's micro-budget indie *Betsy*. Baddeley peppers his insightful reviews, especially those of the best-known werewolf movies, with interesting bits of production trivia (1941's *The Wolf Man* originally contained a scene of the titular anti-hero fighting a bear!), while Canadian lycanthropes represent with enthusiastic reviews of the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy and *Wolfcop*. Amongst the dreck (Alice Cooper in 1986's *Monster Dog*, anyone?), the author highlights several hairy underdogs, including 2004's *Romasanta*, 1990's *Mom*, and the dozen or so films made by Spanish horror star Paul Naschy as the tragic Count Waldemar Daninsky.

The guide is handsomely illustrated with historic drawings, rare (and often gory) production stills, and international poster art. The obvious blood and sweat that went into *The Frightfest Guide to Werewolf Movies* makes it no shaggy dog.

SEAN PLUMMER

INKSTAINED:
ON CREATIVITY, WRITING, AND ARTJohn Urbancik
Dark Fluidity

Capturing the heart of John Urbancik's podcasts across 2017 and 2018, *InkStained* proves essential reading for any writer looking to hone his or her craft. Hell, it might even appease readers who feel driven to ask, for the millionth time, about where authors get their ideas.

Part how-to, part stream-of-thought, Urbancik describes his creative process with selfless abandon, discussing everything from how to capture inspiration from a mundane job to how a focused day at the cemetery can spark the next published novel. We get a sense of walking in the author's shoes as he discusses not only how to cope with the ongoing rush of creative traffic demanding to be heard, but how he personally thrives within it as a writer, an adventurer, and a man. It's as if

he's graciously cracked open his skull, handed over a spoon, and told us to have at 'er. In fact, this book takes such a deep, intimate dive into Urbancik's life as a writer that you'll probably want to roll over and smoke something when you're done.

And while you're free to read at your own pace, you're also encouraged to put in some work:

challenges designed to keep your creative gears greased are scattered throughout the book. From writing seven stories in seven days to self-care suggestions to sampling other art forms, prepare to lay waste to any excuses you might have for not getting more from your muse.

Although some passages do get hammered home a bit severely, most will have you re-reading to ensure you're absorbing as much of Ur-

bancik's wisdom as possible. For this reviewer, the book managed to spark one completed short story and outlines for more. What will *InkStained* do for you? Your mileage may vary, but don't miss finding out.

RICK HIPSON

THE LAST ASTRONAUT

David Wellington
Orbit

If there's one thing Lovecraft got right, it's that space, when you really consider just how vast and unknown it is, is absolutely terrifying. This is where a lot of popular science fiction falls short, as it tends to conjure up humanoid aliens with recognizable (if dystopian) variations

on our own Earth-bound social structures. Yet, if we were ever to meet something from beyond our solar system, it would likely be much more unknown than known – weird, disturbing, and not at all functioning on our biological level.

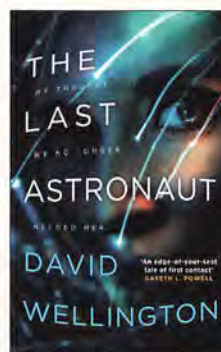
If cliché aliens are where a lot of standard-issue science fiction stumbles, *The Last Astronaut* suffers no such problems. The utterly unknowable forms the rock-solid backbone of the book, which sees fiftysomething retired

astronaut Sally Jansen called back into service by a woefully underfunded NASA, after an object from outside our solar system is determined to a) be headed towards Earth, and b) slowing down (meaning, it's not just space junk). Now NASA and Jansen (in a rocky partnership with the US military) must go toe-to-toe with private interests in a critical first contact mission.

Wellington's alien organism is not only believable, but also horrifying and gross. As such, making contact is nothing like sitting down for a friendly chat in some diplomatic office; it's a horrorshow with a body count. And all of this is made more effective by how the author has chosen to tell his tale, including the use of personal logs, which allow the crew to reflect back on events.

All in all, Wellington has crafted a fine, incredibly well-researched horror novel that reminds all space-watchers that they should be careful what they wish for from the stars.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



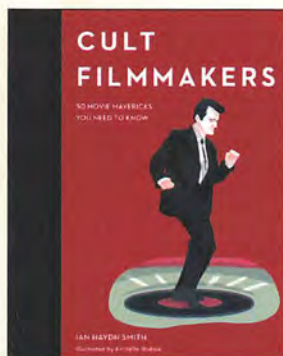


Cult Filmmakers: George A. Romero.

CULT FILMMAKERS: 50 MOVIE MAVERICKS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Ian Hadyn Smith
White Lion Publishing

No reader of this fine publication should require this book, but given that we're creeping ever closer to the holiday season, it still has a place in the Circle, because who doesn't have that one friend or relative who loves movies but rarely steps out of the comfort of the multiplex and Netflix? This handsome, illustrated hardcover guide to cult directors is sure to help broaden their viewing.



While not solely covering horror auteurs, the genre is well-represented here, with a solid mix of older and newer names, including Ana Lily Amirpour, Georges Franju, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Takashi Miike, Gaspar Noé, and Benjamin Christensen, to name but a few. Each one- to two-page blurb features an illustration of the filmmaker (courtesy of Kristelle Rodeia), as well as a short bio, career overview, and summary of his or her most important works and signature style/techniques. Smith does a notable job of packing a lot

of info into a small amount of space without sacrificing readability or layout.

If there's a complaint to be had, it's in the inclusion of some of the bigger directors, who may have started out as cult filmmakers but have since passed so far into the mainstream consciousness that a brief summary probably won't teach anything to anyone who even remotely likes movies (see entries on Tim Burton and Quentin Tarantino, for instance).

Still, this is a great stocking stuffer for that friend who's always wanted to dive deeper into cult and art house cinema but doesn't know where to start. Let this be their guide.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

BIG BOOK OF CLASSIC FANTASY

Ann and Jeff VanderMeer, eds.
Vintage Books

Fantasy, you say? Elves, goblins, magical mirrors, and talking animals? What do they have to do with horror? Part of the answer may be at the very beginning of Arthur Machen's "The White People": "What would your feelings be, seriously, if your cat or your dog began to talk to you, and to dispute with you in human accents? You would be overwhelmed with horror. I am sure of it. And if the roses in your garden sang a

DANTE'S PICK



MANNEQUIN: TALES OF WOOD MADE FLESH

Justin A. Burnett, ed.
Silent Motorist Media

One of horror's key effects is rooted in the uncanny suggestion of life in inanimate objects. Enter dolls, puppets, mannequins and the like — humanoid, but not human; life-like, but not alive. Or are they? The queasy interplay between people and their simulacra has been a staple of the genre for ages, and this fine anthology provides a variety of scenarios which re-enact some of the worst possibilities. Still, as Christopher Slatsky notes in his tellingly titled intro "They Think They're People," there is beauty and trepidation in contemplating the notion that the unthinking may lift their uncomprehending faces to the heavens; horror and fascination gather when things with clumsily constructed arms and legs, and perhaps even a head with eyes and a mouth, sit up to take notice of their surroundings.

The book contains only two reprints, Ramsey Campbell's classic "Cyril," which depicts a shared identity between a human and a puppet, and Matthew M. Bartlett's "Kuklalar," a Ligottian corporate nightmare about marionette-supervisors who go haywire in the office during a heavy storm. As for the originals, "Crawlspace Oracle" by Richard Gavin is an atmospheric tale of divining one's fortune using a "talking" puppet, with an additional turn of the screw. Christine Morgan's unnerving "Window Dressing" deals with a mannequin who assumes the face of a seemingly unstable young businesswoman. "The Part That Dies" by Nicholas Day is old-school (in the good sense), centring on a maid who witnesses the dead twin brother of her master reincarnated into a doll. Vague but suggestive is Justin A. Burnett's "She" in which the police try to decipher a serial killer's strange affinity with a mannequin. Apocalyptic science fiction is imaginatively merged with horror in "Dance of the Marionettes" by C.P. Dunphey, where giant wooden puppets take over the world. And a fitting conclusion comes from Jon Padgett in his "To a Puppet, From a Dummy" in which an essay on puppets insidiously turns into fiction, and a seeming autobiography morphs into a meta-horror story.

The remaining tales deal with dummies, cornhusk dolls, scarecrows, family sickness, creepy kids, identity transfer and various transformations, with enough delirium and pupa-phobia to prove that not all dolls are to be played with.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ



MICHAEL GINGOLD DIVES BACK INTO
THE NEWSPAPERS FOR MORE VINTAGE
HORROR ADS IN **AD NAUSEAM II**

NEWSPRINT NIGHTMARES

BY MONICA S. KUEBLER



HORROR FANS ARE AN OBSESSIVE LOT, AND FOR THIS WE CAN BE THANKFUL.

It's the reason books like *Ad Nauseam* and *Ad Nauseam II* exist, because were it not for the collecting tendencies of RM's Head Online Writer Michael Gingold, we'd have missed out on this fascinating repository of bygone movie marketing.

"I started cutting ads, as well as reviews, out of newspapers when I was twelve years old, in 1979," he says. "Back then, I had just begun seeing horror films in theatres – *Phantasm* was my first – and it was an easy and cheap way to collect mementos of these movies, particularly the ones I couldn't actually see. I never lost that bug, and I continued collecting them until the mid-2010s, when newspapers had pretty much stopped running movie advertising."

Like the first volume, *Ad Nauseam II* (out now from 1984 Publishing) keeps the spotlight on horror ads from NYC-area papers, this time giving the blurb and reviews treatment (in which Gingold intros a film then compiles excerpts of reviews from the era) to 1990s and 2000s releases. The movies covered include *The Exorcist III*, *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, *Crash*, *Killer Condom*, *Ju-on*, as well as dozens of others. Of course, like every collector, Gingold had his holy grails.

"I loved the really bold and outrageous ads for low-budget and foreign films," he says. "They promised all kinds of forbidden delights that were really enticing, even if – as I later discovered – the films themselves sometimes didn't deliver on them. I was also intrigued when a movie would open that I'd never heard of – something I hadn't read about in *Variety*, which my high-school library actually carried, or *Fangoria*. Like when *7 Doors of Death* came out, with Tobe Hooper quoted in the ad; I had no idea what it actually was until I went to see it, and recognized the opening scene from an article on *The Beyond* I had read in a British horror mag."

While some of Gingold's peers thought him "a little strange" for being so

into horror and his parents "tolerated it pretty well," it was his grandparents who most helped feed his obsession, becoming his adult accompaniment to R-rated films. It's fortunate, also, that Gingold's collection was never lost or damaged like so many of the once-loved things from our childhoods.

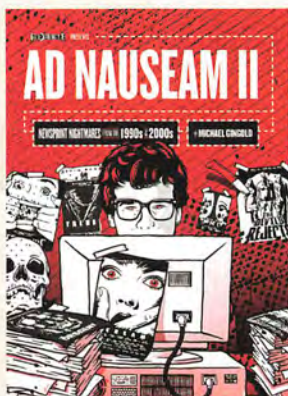
"It helped that they didn't take up much space," he says. "I just kept them all in folders, adding new ones whenever there was another movie out. And though I didn't have a sense of their historical significance for a while, I just felt they were kind of a unique collection to have, so I always wanted to hang on to them. Since the first book came out, so many people have told me that they collected movie ads too when they were young. I wish I had known that back when I felt like I was the only one doing it!"

Much like Gingold's collecting, the *Ad Nauseam* books take a completist approach to the subject matter, covering not just classic and well-known films but also smaller, more obscure ones. However, the reason why some have been omitted might surprise you.

"There are a few that aren't in there because I didn't get to save the ads," he admits. "I was at summer camp when *Don't Go in the Woods* played the New York area, for example."

While newsprint advertising was never intended to be preserved, looking back allows us to reflect not just on our genre's history but how the digital age has completely and irreversibly altered the media landscape.

"These ads are a direct reflection of the way we would consume movies back in the '80s and '90s, before the internet and streaming changed everything," notes Gingold. "You would open the paper and get a sense of excitement seeing these images and reading these taglines, imagining what the films would be like, and I think that sense doesn't exist today. Now, every movie advertising image has to be something that looks good as a tiny thumbnail in a streaming catalog, and the artistry – crude as it sometimes was – of creating those attention-grabbing ads for the papers has been lost." 📄



weird song, you would go mad." Exactly. A slight shift of perspective turns a kiddie tale into the stuff of nightmares. Plus, not all fairies are Disney-cute, as Machen's story proves, and countless horrors were birthed from so-called fairy tales. No wonder, then, that this story (the second-best weird tale ever written, according to Lovecraft) is included in VanderMeer's anthology.



Next to it are others whose fantastic themes and motifs are used in a spooky manner, like the swapped identities of Mary Shelley's "Transformation"; mesmeric meddling with death in Poe's classic "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar"; occult musical instruments like the gut-wrenching "The Ensouled Violin" by H.P. Blavatskaya; transformations such as Franz Kafka's man-to-giant-bug "Metamorphosis"; strange men-animals, like the rat-men in Aleksandr Grin's "The Ratcatcher"; haunted portraits as the one in Edogawa Ranpo's "The Man Traveling with the Brocade Portrait"; scary-romantic mixtures of history, legend and fairy tale in Vernon Lee's "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady"; haunted department stores and living mannequins of John Collier's "Evening Primrose"; and high fantasy merged with horror in the tales by Robert E. Howard and Clark Ashton Smith.

Admittedly, the percentage of stories one could label "horror" is smaller here than in the VanderMeers' earlier anthology *The Weird*, but that shouldn't stop adventurous and open-minded readers from investigating this shadow-realm where even seemingly innocuous dreams easily become disturbing, if not outright nightmarish.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

THE TWISTED ONES

T. Kingfisher
Saga Press

If T. Kingfisher's *The Twisted Ones* seems instantly familiar upon reading, there's good reason for that. It's heavily inspired by Arthur Machen's 1904 short story "The White People" and concerns the Green Book and the fairy folk from that tale, as well as the characters of Colgrave and Ambrose. In this regard, it's a shame that the story behind this novel comes as an afterword rather than a foreword, because what the author has done here is pretty cool – and effective.

Despite *The Twisted Ones'* multitude of connections to Machen's work, familiarity with it is not required to enjoy the novel or its plain-spoken, put-upon first-person narrator, Mouse, who's been tasked with clearing her dead grandmother's hoarded-out house. A terrible enough job without the weird shit that keeps turning up around the property (oddly carved stones, grotesque slaughtered animal effigies, hills that are sometimes there and sometimes not).

As it turns out, the house sits near a passage from one world to another, and things are not going well in that other place. Mouse and three of the locals quickly get drawn into a mystery far darker and more perverse than any of them can imagine.

While the writing in *The Twisted Ones* is more functional than ornate (it's not YA, but reads at roughly that level), Mouse brings enough personality to the proceedings to catch us up in her strange and unsettling adventure. And the spooky things are *spoooooooooooky*, which drives everything along to its final terrible revelation.

The Twisted Ones is a quick but worthy read that takes something classic and gives it a modern makeover. It's also guaranteed to have you seeking out Machen's short story, if you haven't already. So, there's that too.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED

TERROR IN THE DEEP

Once upon a time, not long after I started at *Rue Morgue*, I made a rather flippant comment that virtually anything could be improved with zombies. Now, after nearly two decades of shamblers being shoehorned into every terrain, situation, and era imaginable, I think it might be time to take that statement back. But vampires... that's a different story, especially when it takes place more than 150 metres below the ocean's surface, deep in unfriendly Soviet waters. Welcome to the cursed voyage of the USS *Roanoke* in Steven L. Kent and Nicholas Kaufmann's *100 Fathoms Below* (recently re-released in trade paperback by Blackstone Publishing).

Frequent readers already know that I *love* a good vampire story. Heck, sometimes I'll even love a mediocre one. But *100 Fathoms Below* is great, doing for submarines what *Jaws* did for sharks and water. After all, siege stories are unnerving to begin with; now, imagine one in which the monsters are inside with you and there's no way out (and only limited weapons and light bulbs).

Such is the dire situation on the USS *Roanoke*, whose crew discovers that something is very wrong on their boat just days into their underway (read: submarine lingo for "mission"). The smashed-out lights are the first sign, but it's not long before a body turns up. Of course, these are seasoned seamen and none of them are thinking monsters (rather, some mysterious infection that strikes men with a high fever and sensitivity to light, perhaps). But as the darkness spreads and the body count rises, it becomes harder and harder to attribute the insanity that has overtaken the sub with a medical cause. By the time the remaining men hit on "vampires," they've lost control of their vessel... then there's still the matter of the Soviets.

The novel succeeds not just for its bloodsuckers (cunning, monstrous creatures that infect through a bite), but for its absolutely claustrophobic setting and storytelling. And the kind of darkness that can only exist so far from the sun; darkness that can't be escaped from and might hide a toothy, abnormally fast monster in every nook and cranny.

I'm not going to tell you if anyone makes it out alive, because *100 Fathoms Below's* greatest thrill is its uncertain journey, not its final destination. Just don't be surprised if you never want to set foot on a submarine after reading this book. When I copped to this feeling to co-author Kaufmann, I was both surprised and relieved that he shared the sentiment. Consider yourselves warned.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

STEVEN L. KENT and
NICHOLAS KAUFMANN



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THE FRIGHT GALLERY

CURATED BY GARY PULLIN

191



THIS MONTH:
THE POP CULTURE PASTICHE OF BEAST WRECK

A **RODMERQUE** COLLECTIBLE



NAME

BeastWreck

HOMETOWN

Hickory, North Carolina

WEAPON OF CHOICE

"I prefer good old-fashioned pencil on paper, finished up with pen/brush and ink, and digitally coloured in Photoshop. If speed or necessity is a factor (working for clients who might need revisions), I'll ink digitally in Clip Studio paint on a Yiynova tablet."

DEEDS

"I've been slowly building up my own brand, BeastWreck Stuff, over the past several years, and trying to rely more on that for full-time income, though I do take on client jobs from time to time. My partner, Belle Dee, and I travel around to various horror and pop-culture conventions, slinging our loot, and we love meeting our fans and all the keen artists and celebrities we admire! My most high-profile and rewarding freelance job thus far has been working with Hasbro to create some of the packaging artwork for their Nerf Zombie line of toys."

MY NIGHTMARE FUEL

"I saw a lot of horror movies at a young age (*Alien* at age four) that gave me nightmares for years, but I loved it! As far as real-life fears go, having great harm come to my children is something I hope I never have to endure. Also, I loathe being restrained and unable to move, I hate being deep underground, and the thought of burning to death gives me the screamin' wil-lies, so my ultimate fear is being lodged in an underground pipe/cave and set on fire!"

LAST WORDS

"To whomever has to deal with all the toys and books and collectibles I leave behind when I die: I'm sorry. I hope they end up being worth a lot of money."

RESTING PLACE

On Instagram at @BeastWreck, or beastwreck-stuff.com.

FOLLOW GARY ON TWITTER
@GHOULISHGARY

The Homicidal Homemaker

by KACI HANSEN

WHERE HOME ECONOMICS MEETS HORROR!



COOKIES AND CREAM TOMBSTONE COOKIES

Yield: one dozen 3-inch cookies

- 1/2 cup salted butter, softened
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 2 oz. cream cheese, softened
- 1 large egg
- 1 1/2 teaspoons clear vanilla
- 1/8 teaspoon baking powder
- 8-10 chocolate sandwich cookies, finely crushed
- 2 cups all-purpose flour

OTHER TOOLS AND SUPPLIES:

Tombstone-shaped cookie cutters
Letter cookie stamps

Using a mixer, cream together butter and sugar until light yellow and fluffy. Add in the egg, vanilla, and cream cheese and mix just until combined. Then mix in the baking powder.

Add in the crushed chocolate sandwich cookies and the flour, 1/2 cup at a time, and mix just until the dough is no longer sticky and begins to pull away from the sides of the bowl.

Pat the dough into a disc, and wrap in plastic wrap. Chill for at least 3 hours.

To bake: Begin by preheating your oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with a silicone baking mat or parchment paper. Roll the dough 1/4" thick, and cut out cookies. Then use the cookie stamps or a toothpick to "engrave" your tombstones with silly names or phrases ("Al B. Bach," "Barry M. Deep," "Rest in Pieces," etc.). Bake for 7-10 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to cool for 2 minutes before moving to a baking rack to fully cool. Serve as is, or sandwich two of them together with buttercream icing for spooktacular sandwich cookies!

HOLIDAYS ARE A WONDERFUL TIME to spend with family and friends, but sometimes the pressures of shopping and prepping can make one feel like they're six feet underground! Nothing beats a personal, homemade gift – especially when it's edible – and these cookies are a perfect way to creep out those holiday dessert platters. Crushed-up chocolate sandwich cookies give the dough a marbled appearance and, best of all, they require little effort to decorate!

If you give this recipe a try, let us know! Don't forget to tag your photo with #ruemorgue and #homicidalhomemaker on Instagram and Twitter.

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DANGEROUS

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DOA
DEAD ON
ARRIVAL

REVIEWS BY D.D. CROWLEY, ALEX DELLER, MARK R. HASAN,
AARON VON LUPTON, JEFF SZPIRGAS, AND GLENN TILSON



LA MASCHERA DEL DEMONIO

Roberto Nicolosi

SPIKEROT RECORDS

La Maschera Del Demonio, better known to English-speaking viewers as *Black Sunday*, was the first film officially directed by Maria Bava (he went uncredited on previous efforts) and kicked off a tradition in which the maestro's film scores were replaced for the US market. Deemed too sparse and "too Italian" by American International Pictures, Roberto Nicolosi's doomy, gothic music was switched with a more standard haunted house score by Les Baxter, but the original now arrives on vinyl for the first time with twenty unreleased cues, courtesy of Spikerot Records. Indeed, it's a little on the short side, but opens with a grandiose main theme in the vein of James Bernard's *Dracula*, before descending into quieter, very bassy sequences designed around percussion, brass, and piano. Not quite as colourful sounding as one would expect from an Italian horror original, the beauty of Nicolosi's music remains in the shadows, classic in its sound and bone chilling in its delivery. **AVL**

SOUNDTRACK

SQÜRL (collaborating with producer Carter Logan). Taking cues from classics like Morricone's *The Thing* and Goblin's *Dawn of the Dead*, the score kicks off with the doomy jam "The Dead Just Don't Wanna Die Today," a wash of distorted, fuzzy guitars strumming minor chord riffs that suggest Jarmusch's idiosyncratic humour is going to be laced with tragedy. Often relying on spacey guitar riffs and ambient sounds, the music stands well in isolation as lengthy, dreamy ruminations of the apocalypse. The album, which mixes SQÜRL's music with dialogue clips, is nearly a complete representation of the movie, with one key omission: Sturgill Simpson's instant-classic title track that's the true laid-back soul of the film. That aside, Jarmusch's soundtrack stands on equal footing with other classic zombie scores. **JS**



DRY BLOOD

System Syn

BURNING WITCHES RECORDS

Long running electro-industrial outfit System Syn (a.k.a. Clint Carney) recently wrote, produced, and starred in the independent horror film *Dry Blood*, and thanks to Carney's day job in music, also lent an intriguing, if minimalist score to the project. Propelled by a steady, plodding beat, Carney adds a haunting piano melody that places the film firmly in '80s slasher movie territory, then layers the whole thing in weird electronic effects, almost as if backmasking were being applied. Side two of this LP from UK synth darling Burning Witches is focused more on melody and autumn-like atmosphere before harsh electronic noise takes over, setting up suspenseful set pieces for the film's climax. The score for *Dry Blood* does indeed reflect a lower budget film, but there is enough

here in terms of tone and atmosphere to interest horror fans, making System Syn a composer to watch out for. **AVL**



DANTE TOMASELLI

Out-Of-Body Experience

TUNECORE

Dante Tomaselli's fifth album stays within the composer/filmmaker's realm of deeply immersive audio experiences, but by evoking the synth sounds of video games and electronic instruments of his suburban youth, *Out-Of-Body Experience* becomes a decisive narrative that teases the listener with sonic visions of angular, rain-slicked tunnels. Each cue marks a turn or descending stairwell that reverberates with techno beats, melting synth chords, and benthic drones that perpetually shape-shift and swirl across the stereo image. A recurring motif is the voice of infamous cult leader Reverend Jim Jones, but the real attraction goes beyond Tomaselli's renowned sound design;

ELECTRONIC

textures, pulses, synth waves and raining frequencies are crafted with extraordinary clarity. It's a work that demands full attention, yet like his prior recordings, eases the listener into a calm state, even when a child beckons one to "Run!" **MRH**



SKELETON BEACH

Ritual

GRIEF THIEF RECORDS

Skeleton Beach (a.k.a. electronic artist Gene Priest) tackles a unique project on *Ritual*, a concept album about an individual's discovery of the occult and harnessing of the dark arts, delivered through the sound of '80s synth scores and modular music à la Tangerine Dream/Klaus Schulze. From the opening track "Blood Moon," there is an unmistakable John Carpenter-meets-Berlin School of electronic music influence, setting the foundation for an album that is part horror soundtrack homage and part experimental mind trip. *Ritual*'s finest moments come from long, contemplative, ambient tracks such as

ELECTRONIC



THE DEAD DON'T DIE

SQÜRL

SACRED BONES RECORDS

It's always interesting when a writer/director gets to wear the composer hat, and in *The Dead Don't Die*, Jim Jarmusch does so under the moniker

SOUNDTRACK



PODCAST SPOTLIGHT

THE
NO SLEEP
PODCAST

NAME: The NoSleep Podcast

THEME: Scary stories

FREQUENCY: Weekly

FORMAT: Audio play

What started out as a subreddit for amateur fiction writers to share their scary short stories is now a podcast in its 13th season! Developed in 2011 by showrunner David Cummings, *The NoSleep Podcast* is a radio show where selected stories pulled from the forum are performed by a cast of regular readers and voice actors, making each story its own bite-sized radio drama. With an eclectic range of writers at varying levels of skill and subject matter, the stories are sometimes funny, often disturbing, but always terrifying. The weekly podcast is free but paid members gain access to special, unreleased episodes of some of the scariest stories submitted. A great show to listen to on a dark, autumn night, or any other season for that matter — check out their site for live show tour dates! **DDC**

LISTEN TO MY NIGHTMARE

Between Ari Aster's *Midsommer* and the announcement of the forthcoming documentary *Woodlands Dark and Days Bewitched: A History of Folk Horror*, I think it's safe to say that folk horror is officially a thing. It's a difficult subgenre to describe but, generally speaking, it involves macabre happenings on an English countryside, ancient traditions, and pagan rituals gone bad. Bottom line: it pulls cinematic influence from Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man* (1973). Since Paul Giovanni's soundtrack of traditional, seductive folk music played such a key role in that film, it shouldn't come as a surprise that the folk horror label is now popping up in music, used by new artists and retroactively applied to past releases. Folk horror music isn't just relegated to folk sounds, however, it can permeate across any genre that conjures the atmosphere of countryside bonfires and human sacrifice amongst the cornrows – the presence of folk horror in retro synth music looms large, for example. Here's a quick look at some of the key artists who have contributed to this developing trend in music.

A Year in the Country

A Year in the Country isn't so much a band as audiovisual project that makes music compilations, books and more, inspired by "hidden and underlying tales of the land, the further reaches of folk music and... where such things meet and intertwine with the lost futures, spectral histories and parallel worlds." We've covered them in *Rue Morgue* before, and recommend that you check out *The Corn Mother*, in which various folk and retro synth artists align to conjure images of pagan ceremonies and fall harvests.

Comus

This short-lived folk band from the early '70s is one of paganism's best kept secrets. Comus' 1971 debut *First Utterance* sounds thoroughly bizarre and contains all manner of ritual references to violence, murder, and human sacrifice. The band reformed in 2008 and released three new songs on the 2012 album *Out of the Coma*. Over the years, Comus has earned a steady core of diehard fans, which include Opeth singer/songwriter Mikael Åkerfeldt, who has referenced Comus numerous times in the group's lyrics and album titles.

Broadcast and the Focus Group Investigate Witch Cults of the Radio Age

Most horror fans recognize Broadcast as the group behind the psychedelic soundtrack to the 2012 Italian horror homage *Barbarian Sound Studio*. In 2009, they joined with The Focus Group (a.k.a. Julian House, owner of label Ghost Box, who signed A Year in the Country and other folk horror artists) to create this album of samples from horror films, 1960s BBC soundtracks, occult readings and more. British music magazine *The Wire* voted it album of the year.

The Hare and the Moon

Part of the Reverb Worship label, another major player in the folk horror revival, The Hare and the Moon played wind and string instrument-based neoclassical ballads inspired, according to their Bandcamp page, by "MR James, Arthur Machen, ghost stories, Black Sabbath, Pentangle and *The Wicker Man*." That's folk horror as fuck! Unfortunately, after seven albums, the Scottish duo broke up in 2017.

AARON VON LUPTON

the dark and sensuous "False Faith," as well as the bright neon "Ceremony." Ultimately Skeleton Beach will appeal to those who still drool over the synth scores for *Stranger Things* and *Drive* and, though it does not evoke the old time witchcraft feel that Priest aims to deliver, that is in and of itself good reason to take part in this ritual. 🐱🐱🐱 AVL



LINDSAY SCHOOLCRAFT

GOTH

Martyr

(INDEPENDENT)

Know that feeling when you have a particular itch in need of scratching? It might be slashers, zombies... or a certain Italian goth-metal band. If Lacuna Coil is your thing and you're itching for a dose, here's your methadone. Ontario's own Lindsay Schoolcraft may be best known for her role as keyboardist, harpist, and co-vocalist in the iconic goth/black metal act Cradle of Filth, but on *Martyr* she's taken a few steps back from the abyss to offer her own introspective take on darkness. Yes, the first few songs owe more than a little to Lacuna Coil but things shift with "Blood From a Stone" and "Dawn," keyboard and harp ballads that are both darkly effective. Then it's back to goth-metal territory (with some guest death vox on "See the Light") until a cover of The Cure's "Lullaby" rounds things out nicely. Original? Hardly. But it does scratch that itch.

🐱🐱🐱 GT



THE GREAT OLD ONES

METAL

Cosmicism

SEASON OF MIST

While a mere decade wouldn't give an ancient tentacled deity enough time to pass wind through one of its protoplasmic tubes, it has nevertheless allowed this French black metal hoard to hone and refine their chilly sound. Cold and stark as the distant

light from a dying star, *Cosmicism* glides effortlessly between scything hostility, maudlin melody and epic, cosmos-straddling extravagance. True to form, the scope of the sound is matched by an ambitiously lofty concept, touching base with a range of gruesome Lovecraftian entities while exposing humanity's bathetic meaninglessness when measured against the swirling vastness of an uncaring universe. The regular edition comes wrapped in evocative Jeff Grimal artwork, while those with more cash to splash can invest in a special, limited-to-500 digibox edition that comes with bonus track "To a Dreamer" and a grumpy-looking Cthulhu figurine. 🐱🐱🐱 AD



EXHUMED

METAL

Horror

RELEASE

Despite a near-comical run of lineup changes and numerous shifts in the genre's amorphous parameters, gore-drenched death metal outfit Exhumed has managed to maintain a remarkable consistency in terms of both quality and identity over the past two decades. Its latest putrid opus, the aptly titled *Horror*, sees absolutely no let-up in terms of brutality or depraved genre sentiment, with slabs like "Utter Mutilation of Your Corpse," "Dead Meat," and "Re-Animated" sounding as intense as you'd expect, with guttural vocals, unstoppable drums, and guitars like a bonesaw rasping its merry way through still-warm meat. Diehard fans and collector scum will be pleased to learn that an elaborate, ultra-limited and hugely on-brand edition of the album exists – one that pays gleeful homage to the band's '80s splatter vid fixation, and comes swaddled in a box that looks like a vintage VCR and is accompanied by a playable video cassette and a bundle of neat rental store bumf. 🐱🐱🐱 AD



CANNABIS CORPSE LIGHTS UP THE NIGHTMARES OF PSYCHOTIC MARIJUANA ABUSE ON THEIR LATEST ALBUM, NUG SO VILE

Reaper Madness

BY AARON VON LUFTON

WEED AND HORROR MOVIES GO TOGETHER LIKE FINE WINE AND GOURMET CHEESE.

with many a fright fan having fond memories of rolling a fat one and tripping out over some choice gore flick (perhaps, fittingly, marijuana became legal in Canada in October 2018). But most pot smokers can also remember a trip gone bad, nights when the buzz spiraled down a rabbit hole of anxiety and paranoia. Marijuana-themed death metal band Cannabis Corpse takes those nightmarish experiences one step further on their latest album *Nug So Vile*, out November 1 from Season of Mist. The release features eleven tracks of bong-ripping brutality that detail the over-the-top, horror-filled fantasies of a hardcore stoner whose trip has gone very, very wrong.

Formed in 2006 in Richmond, Virginia, Cannabis Corpse is (yet another) side project from Phil "Landfill" Hall, better known as the bassist for crossover thrash party outfit Municipal Waste and guitarist for Iron Reagan. Joined by brother Josh "HallHammer" Hall on drums, the duo set out to form a band that would pay tribute to their two favourite pastimes: brutal death metal and delicious THC. Over the years, Cannabis Corpse has spoofed death metal in its album and song titles, including its 2006 debut *Blunted at Birth* (a play on Cannibal Corpse's *Butchered at Birth*), and *Left Hand Pass* (as in Entombed's groundbreaking album *Left Hand Path*), while its name is a fairly obvious take on the biggest extreme metal band of all time. It all comes together on *Nug So Vile*, a green and red dimebag of weed, gore and laughs.

"*Nug So Vile* is eleven brand new songs of weed horror," Phil tells *Rue Morgue*. "Our goal is to terrify the listener with grotesque tales of marijuana murder. We have put a lot of effort into harshing people's buzz."

Indeed, they have. Over the course of the album, all manner of depravities are recounted in extreme detail, from the perverse to just plain dumb. Consider the following refined poetry from the title track: "Disoriented, when I awake the

creatures gone / I feel agonizing pain coming from my dong / In horror I see my prick is now turning green / Mutated veins sprouting leaves."

"We wrote 'Nug So Vile' about a futuristic space explorer crash landing onto a mysterious weed planet and then copulating with one of its beautiful alien life forms," Phil explains. "The next morning, he awakens to discover that his dick is painfully turning into a weed nug."

Along the way, death heads will get their fill of old school bowel-shaking metal full of guttural vocals, face-ripping riffs and double bass destruction on tracks like "Conquerors of Chronaggeddon (a reference to Brasil's Krisiun), and "Blasphemy Made Hash" (a nod to Montreal's Cryptopsy). Cannabis Corpse vocalist George "Corpsegrinder" Fisher provides guest vocals on "Cheeba Jigsoe Quandary," bringing everything full circle.

Outside of constantly getting stoned ("Making music is fun, but sometimes it can take many hours of tedious studio work; getting high helps," Phil offers), art also plays a key role in Cannabis Corpse's goopy product.

"I am sure that horror art has seeped into my brain as inspiration unconsciously," says Phil. "I also like a lot of Alan Moore's work (*Swamp Thing*, *Watchmen*, etc.). I find him to be a very fascinating author."

Taking their own art one step further, Josh created an animated video for the track "Cylinders of Madness": a gory, hilarious and altogether perfect visual accompaniment to Cannabis Corpse's musical debauchery.

"After a week of continuous intravenous THC and deep reflective thought on the state of the human condition, I just started drawing and that video is what happened," explains Josh. "Sometimes I would lose consciousness and, upon my awakening, new drawings had appeared. I don't develop concepts; the concepts develop me."

So light one up, and let *Nug So Vile* burn new holes in your psyche and soul. After all, there ain't no law against it. 🍄



PLAY DEAD



NOW PLAYING > WORSE THAN DEATH, BLAIR WITCH

WORSE THAN DEATH

WORSE THAN DEATH

iOS, PS4, Nintendo Switch, PC
Benjamin Rivers Inc.

For many, high school is already a fairly horrific time. With all the insecurities that plague the adolescent brain, it's an arduous half-decade of mania and depression filled with some of life's highest highs and lowest lows – a fitting setting for developer Benjamin Rivers' latest adventure, *Worse Than Death*.

Horror fans may already be familiar with Rivers' previous title, *Home*, a psychological thriller that made a big splash in the indie community upon its 2012 release. This time around, players assume the role of Holly, a woman in her late twenties, returning to her small hometown for a ten-year high school reunion. It's there she reconnects with Flynn, her closest friend and victim of an unfortunate accident that claimed the life of classmate and homecoming queen, Grace. When the townsfolk start meeting their demise in gloriously gory fashion, it's up to Holly to discover who (or what) is at the centre of the mystery she had fled years before.

Sporting a pixelated art style that's all at once quaint and beautifully intricate, *Worse Than Death* also features sudden and frequent splashes of hand-drawn art – created entirely on an iPad Pro – that help punctuate the moments of terror Holly encounters along her journey. These illustrations add even greater detail to

the darkly clever puzzles, one highlight being a frozen severed human hand thawing in a microwave. Yum!

Gameplay here is relatively simple, perfectly suited for both touchscreen devices and fluid play with your preferred console's controller. Holly is able to run, jump, and swiftly conceal herself in lockers and darkened doorways to avoid detection from the Lovecraftian horrors that give chase.

Headphones are highly recommended, as *Worse Than Death's* audio is easily one of its crowning achievements. Marrying perfectly with the game's ambience, the 3D positional audio aids considerably in ramping up the spook factor in its tensest moments.

With all the heart that made Benjamin Rivers' *Home* and *Alone With You* stand out in a saturated indie market, *Worse Than Death* is perhaps the developer's best work yet.

EVAN MILLAR



HEADSHOTS: GRIPPING AND EMOTIONAL STORY, STELLAR SOUND DESIGN, INTENSE GAMEPLAY
MISFIRES: LATE GAME PUZZLES ARE TOUGH AND PRONE TO STUMPING



BLAIR WITCH

Xbox One, PC
Bloober Team

When Bloober Team (the Polish developer behind such spooky atmospheric titles as *Layers of Fear* and *Ob-server*) announced a *Blair Witch* game at E3 2019 based on the film franchise, the horror world took notice. Set in 1996, a few years after the disappearance of Heather, Josh and Mike from the original film, the story follows former police officer Ellis as he heads into the Burkittsville woods to look for a missing child with his dog, Bullet. Armed with about as much as the original movie trio were (flashlight, cellphone, camcorder), Ellis is quickly lost and besieged by supernatural baddies as the environment warps and shifts around him. Moreover, his own personal demons emerge in the woods and, of course, the spectre of a witch bent on helping Ellis come unglued.

Bloober Team has the uncanny ability to create moody, beautiful, scary and psychologically mind-warping games, so the bar was set high for *Blair Witch*, not just to emulate the feeling of

the film but to match the quality of its predecessors. Unfortunately, the game takes on too many subplots for Ellis (including PTSD, a failing marriage and... time travel?), making for a confusing storyline that detracts from the spooky ambience. Furthermore, Ellis isn't the most likeable protagonist, which makes Bullet the real hero. There is some lip service paid to the first film, but where *The Blair Witch Project* excelled in its minimal simplicity, the game is bogged down by narrative

filler and the occasional frustrating glitch.

That said, Bloober can still make one hell of an atmospheric narrative horror game, and when creatures do emerge in your peripheral vision, you'll feel that dread in your guts. The psychological experiences are wonderful, the environment is eerie, and the music and sound mixing are phenomenal – from the violins that drift in and out to the chilling silence, save for a snapping branch. It's overall a fun horror game, just not a great *Blair Witch* one.

D.D. CROWLEY



HEADSHOTS: A CHILLING SOUNDTRACK, EXTREMELY EERIE ATMOSPHERE, BULLET THE DOG
MISFIRES: TOO MANY STORY ELEMENTS, SOME GLITCHES, FIGHTING MECHANICS ARE WEAK

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EVEN THE BEST FILMMAKERS STRADDLE THE LINE BETWEEN HOMAGE AND BLATANT COPYING. SOME HAVE EVEN ACCUSED ONE OF THE GENRE'S BIGGEST NAMES OF RIPPING OFF A CANADIAN HOLIDAY CLASSIC FOR HIS SEMINAL 1978 SLASHER FILM. IS HE GUILTY? TWO OF OUR WRITERS ENTER THE RING TO BATTLE IT OUT...

DID JOHN CARPENTER RIP OFF BLACK CHRISTMAS FOR HALLOWEEN?

YES!

CARLY MAGA

"If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Carpenter's reverence for *Black Christmas* is as clear as Barb's glass unicorn."

WE'VE ALL HEARD THE LEGEND — Bob Clark told John Carpenter that if he ever did a sequel to his 1974 sorority house horror *Black Christmas*, it would see the murderous Billy escape from a mental institution a year after the original film and return to the same house, only this time on Halloween. And that's where Carpenter got the idea for his career-making lynchpin, case closed. Right? But the similarities between both films go far beyond the elevator pitch — not only are certain shots straight-up plucked from *Black Christmas* in *Halloween*, but characters and themes are too. And in true rip-off fashion, Carpenter didn't do them as well.

Both films begin with an undisclosed male killer, silently invading a young woman's domestic space shown through a first-person tracking shot — *Black Christmas*'s Billy climbs up the house's trellis and *Halloween*'s Michael Myers murders his sister in her bedroom — putting the audience into the upsetting dual perspective of both villain and victim. Both killers spy on the characters through curtained windows. Both films feature long, still shots of empty rooms to create a sense of dread, and stylized tricks of light and shadow keep the killer's identity mysterious. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Carpenter's reverence for *Black Christmas* is as clear as Barb's glass unicorn.

It's Carpenter's characters that give away *Halloween* as the inferior entry, since he attempts to show female friendship in the complex, respectful, and empowering ways that Clark does, but ends up relying on the stereotypes of teenage girls as either virgins or sluts, destined to die or survive. With the *Halloween* sequels focusing more and more on Michael Myers as a villain and less on his victims, *Black Christmas* remains a story about women taking ownership of their lives and a faceless man who tries to stop them — it looks like Clark was right to opt out of a sequel. The real question is, his loss or ours?



NO!

JOE O'BRIEN

"Only after hundreds of other cheap slasher imitations utilized it ad absurdum did critics look back and suggest a *Black Christmas* connection. And it's just not there."

TRUE, *BLACK CHRISTMAS* AND *HALLOWEEN* WERE BOTH FOUNDATIONAL TO THE SLASHER SUBGENRE, but it's more accurate to say they exist along a continuum of cinematic influence; each a discrete step on a path leading from *Psycho* to today. Both amplified *Psycho*'s shifting of the murder mystery into a pure horror space and kicked off the slasher boom, but *Black Christmas* takes only tentative steps in that direction. It keeps one foot firmly in Agatha Christie territory as baffled detectives and red herrings shuffle in and out, but the instant Dr. Loomis shouts "It's gone from here! The Evil is gone!" *Halloween* abandons all pretense of being anything but a horror movie.

Halloween's development is extremely well-documented, and contrary to the urban legend, no one at any point said "Black Christmas, but at Halloween." Pitched to Carpenter as *The Babysitter Murders* by producer Irwin Yablans, the notion of setting it at Halloween came later, after Carpenter and Debra Hill had begun the writing process. Carpenter's a student of all cinema, not just horror (his off-stated genre preference is westerns). His reference points run much broader and deeper than a movie released three years prior.

Black Christmas leans heavily on the "Killer's POV" that became a tried-and-true slasher trope. Commonly referenced as the strongest indicator of influence on Carpenter, but tellingly, and perhaps surprisingly, he never re-uses the technique in that film — all the POV shots past that point are Laurie Strode's. If it owes a debt, it's to Orson Welles, not Bob Clark. Only after hundreds of other cheap slasher imitations utilized it ad absurdum did critics look back and suggest a *Black Christmas* connection. And it's just not there.

Calling *Halloween* a rip-off of *Black Christmas* is a reductive argument and a disservice to two great films. So let's stick a knife in it, shall we?



LAST ISSUE'S WINNER
AS VOTED BY YOU ON FACEBOOK

HAS HORROR FINALLY BEEN ACCEPTED
BY THE MAINSTREAM?

SEAN
PLUMMER

46% YES

54% NO

BRYAN
CHRISTOPHER

NO, HORROR ISN'T IN THE MAINSTREAM YET, AND THAT'S AT LEAST PARTLY DUE TO THE FACT WE HORROR FANS DON'T WANT IT TO BE THERE.

'TIS THE SEASON



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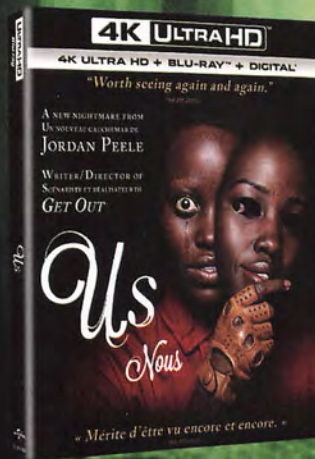
GLASS
DVD/BLU-RAY/4K



HALLOWEEN (2018)
DVD/BLU-RAY/4K



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DVD/BLU-RAY/4K



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